

The Ramayana of Valmiki

A Complete Modern English Translation

BOOK - I



Translated by : Hari Prasad Shastri

THE
RAMAYANA
OF
VALMIKI

Translated by
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CONTENTS

BOOK I—BALA KANDA

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. Shri Narada relates to Valmiki the story of Rama - -	3
2. Valmiki creates the metrical form for the story - -	9
3. The deeds of Rama that will be described in the sacred poem - - - - -	12
4. Shri Rama's sons chant the poem - - - - -	15
5. King Dasaratha's kingdom and capital - - - - -	17
6. The city of Ayodhya - - - - -	18
7. The administration of the kingdom - - - - -	20
8. The king decides to perform a sacrifice for the birth of a son - - - - -	22
9. Sumantra relates a tradition that a son will be born through the help of Rishyasringa - - - - -	24
10. He describes how Rishyasringa was brought to King Lomapada's court - - - - -	25
11. King Dasaratha goes to King Lomapada, by whose permission Rishyasringa comes to Ayodhya - -	27
12. Rishyasringa agrees to assist in the sacrifice - - -	29
13. The sacrifice is commenced - - - - -	30
14. The ceremonies are performed with the appropriate rites - - - - -	33
15. To destroy Ravana, Shri Vishnu resolves to incarnate - - - - -	36
16. He decides to incarnate as the four sons of King Dasaratha - - - - -	38
17. To assist Shri Vishnu, celestial beings incarnate as warriors of the monkey tribe - - - - -	40
18. King Dasaratha's sons are born and grow to manhood - - - - -	42
19. Vishwamitra's request - - - - -	46
20. The king's reluctance to allow Shri Rama to contend with Maricha and Suvahu - - - - -	47
21. On Vasishtha's advice the king acquiesces - - - - -	49
22. Ramachandra and Lakshmana set forth with Vishwamitra - - - - -	50
23. They reach the hermitage of Kama - - - - -	52
24. The two princes with Vishwamitra behold the dark forest of Taraka - - - - -	54
25. Vishwamitra seeks to convince Rama that it is his duty to slay Taraka - - - - -	56
26. How the Yakshini Taraka was slain - - - - -	57
27. Shri Rama is given the celestial weapons - - - - -	59
28. He is instructed in their use - - - - -	61
29. Vishwamitra relates the story of his hermitage and commences the sacrifice - - - - -	62

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
30. Maricha and Suvahu obstruct the sacrifice and are slain by Rama - - - - -	64
31. Vishwamitra starts out with the two princes to attend King Janaka's sacrifice - - - - -	66
32. Vishwamitra tells of his ancestors and the dynasty of King Kusha - - - - -	68
33. King Kushanabha's hundred daughters - - - - -	69
34. His son, Gadhi, is the father of Vishwamitra - - - - -	71
35. Vishwamitra begins to narrate the origin of the holy river Gunga - - - - -	73
36. The story of the King of Himalayas' younger daughter Uma - - - - -	74
37. The king's elder daughter, Gunga - - - - -	76
38. The story of King Sagara, Shri Rama's ancestor - - - - -	78
39. The horse with which he performs a sacrifice is stolen - - - - -	80
40. The king's sons search for the horse; they accuse Shri Kapila of stealing it and are reduced to ashes - - - - -	81
41. King Sagara's grandson, Anshuman, finds the horse and the ashes of his uncles. He is told the funeral rites must be performed with the waters of the holy river Gunga - - - - -	83
42. Anshuman's son, Dilipa, fails and his son Bhagiratha performs austerities to induce the holy river to descend - - - - -	84
43. Lord Shiva lets loose the sacred river which follows King Bhagiratha's celestial chariot - - - - -	86
44. King Bhagiratha completes the funeral rites for his ancestors - - - - -	88
45. Vishwamitra begins to relate the story of the city of Vishala and the churning of the ocean, which leads to the combat between the Devas and the Titans - - - - -	90
46. Diti undergoes severe austerities for the birth of a son - - - - -	93
47. The holy sage and the princes arrive at Vishala and are welcomed by King Pramati - - - - -	94
48. They come to Gautama's hermitage and Vishwamitra relates its story - - - - -	95
49. Shri Rama liberates Ahalya from Gautama's curse and departs for Mithila - - - - -	97
50. They are welcomed at the place of sacrifice by King Janaka - - - - -	99
51. Gautama's son Shatananda relates more of the story of the Sage Vishwamitra - - - - -	101
52. How King Vishwamitra visits Vasishtha's hermitage and accepts hospitality provided by the wish-fulfilling cow, Shabala - - - - -	103
53. The king desires to possess Shabala but Vasishtha will not give her up - - - - -	104
54. King Vishwamitra attempts to carry her away by force - - - - -	106

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
55. Shabala creates an army which annihilates Vishwamitra's forces - - - - -	107
56. Shri Vasishtha by his spiritual strength conquers Vishwamitra who then engages in penances - - -	109
57. Shri Vasishtha refuses to help King Trishanku enter heaven in his physical state - - - - -	111
58. The king appeals to Shri Vasishtha's sons to conduct the sacrifice. They curse him and he appeals to Vishwamitra - - - - -	112
59. Vishwamitra seeks the help of the sons of Vasishtha and Mahodeva; they refuse and are cursed - -	114
60. Through fear of Vishwamitra, the sages assist in the sacrifice and King Trishanku ascends to a specially created heaven - - - - -	115
61. King Ambarisha's sacrificial horse is lost and he seeks a human victim - - - - -	117
62. Shunashepha, the human victim, seeks and obtains help from Vishwamitra - - - - -	118
63. After more austerities Vishwamitra is proclaimed a Maharishi - - - - -	120
64. Indra is perturbed and sends Rambha to disturb the further austerities of the sage - - - - -	122
65. Vishwamitra performs another thousand years' austerities and acquires brahmanhood - - - - -	123
66. King Janaka relates the story of the great bow and the birth of Sita - - - - -	126
67. The illustrious Rama breaks the bow and is given the Princess Sita in marriage - - - - -	127
68. King Janaka sends messengers to invite King Dasaratha to the capital - - - - -	129
69. King Dasaratha sets out with his spiritual preceptor, relations and ministers - - - - -	130
70. The king, Vishwamitra and the princes are invited to King Janaka's court where Vishwamitra relates the descent of the dynasty - - - - -	131
71. King Janaka gives an account of the succession and his dynasty - - - - -	134
72. The marriage of the four sons of King Dasaratha is arranged and preparations commence - - -	135
73. The marriage ceremonies are completed - - - - -	137
74. Parasurama appears amidst inauspicious signs - - -	139
75. He challenges Rama to combat - - - - -	141
76. Parasurama is vanquished and deprived of his glory and power - - - - -	142
77. King Dasaratha with his army, the princes and their brides, return to Ayodhya - - - - -	144

INTRODUCTION

WESTERN culture is only just beginning to look beyond the Roman and Greek civilizations for new inspiration. Even so, it is a little surprising that, although the mighty epics of the Iliad and the Odyssey are widely known and loved, only a few scholars have studied their Hindu counterparts known as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In fact no good complete¹ modern English translation of the *Ramayana* exists, and the best of those made in the last half of the 19th century are unobtainable outside the larger libraries.

The *Ramayana* is a work of great antiquity attributed to the illustrious Sage Valmiki. Its date of composition cannot be fixed with any certainty, particularly as, in common with other Sanskrit classics, it was not at first committed to writing, but was passed on from singer to singer. This process also accounts for the fact that the various versions (*Sakhas*) of the poem that have come down to us differ slightly in context. The interesting fact is that the scholars are agreed that the *Ramayana* is the grandly conceived and executed masterpiece of one poet, and not a collection of stories from many sources, loosely gathered together.

Unfortunately we know very little about the Rishi Valmiki, whose title 'Adikavi' (First poet) and pre-eminence in Sanskrit verse has never been seriously challenged to this day. He was a robber chief in a forest in Northern India and on one occasion waylaid two ascetics for the purpose of plundering them. The travellers, however, spoke to him with kindness, and offered him the spiritual truth in lieu of the gold and silver which they did not possess. Convinced of their sincerity and on their advice, Valmiki changed his mode of life and became a devotee of Shri Ramachandra, the Seventh Incarnation of God (Vishnu)

¹ The version of *Ramayana* included in *Hindu Scriptures* is a much abbreviated edition of the original, most of the legends being omitted.

INTRODUCTION

on earth. After a long period of meditation on the form and virtues of Shri Rama, it is said that he was granted a vision of Rama's life from beginning to end.

He gave expression to this unique experience, in Sanskrit verse, in the 24,000 *slokas* (48,000 lines) known as the Ramayana. The *sloka* is a specific metre which the poet himself discovered, as is told in a beautiful passage in the first book.

The poem is divided into seven books (*Kandas*) of unequal length, which may be very briefly summarised as follows :—

Book I. (Bala-Kanda.) King Dasaratha of Ayodhya (Oudh), performs a sacrifice in the hope of obtaining a son. At this time the Gods (*Devas*) are alarmed at the power acquired by the mighty Titan named Ravana, who, by the practice of black magic had conquered almost all of the known world. King Dasaratha's prayer is answered and his three wives bear four sons, Rama, Bharata and the twins Lakshmana and Shatrughna, who are all partial incarnations of Shri Vishnu. Vishnu, however, manifests himself more fully in Shri Rama than in the other brothers. The boys grow up and Shri Rama wins as his bride, Sita, the daughter of King Janaka of the neighbouring kingdom of Videha.

Book II. (Ayodhya-Kanda.) King Dasaratha intends to proclaim Shri Rama heir-apparent, but the jealousy of his second queen, Kaikeyi, is aroused and she holds the king to a promise made formerly, that he would grant her two boons. The boons she now secures are the banishment of Shri Rama to the forest for fourteen years, and the installation of her own son Bharata as *Yuvaraja*.¹ According to the law of righteousness (*dharma*) a vow must be honoured, and Shri Rama calmly accepts the sentence of exile. He travels south to Chitrakuta in the Dandaka Forest with his wife Sita and his brother Lakshmana. King Dasaratha dies of grief and Bharata implores Shri Rama to return to the throne, but the latter adheres firmly to the vindication of his father's honour and the fulfilment of his vow.

Book III. (Aranya-Kanda.) After about ten years in the forest with her husband, Princess Sita is kidnapped by the Titan Ravana, and taken by him to his capital, Lanka (the modern Ceylon).

¹ *Yuvaraja* = heir-apparent.

INTRODUCTION

Book IV. (Kishkindhya-Kanda.) Rama and Lakshmana in pursuit of Ravana and to rescue Sita, enlist the aid of King Sugriva, leader of the monkey tribe, whose chief minister Hanuman becomes the foremost devotee and servant of Shri Rama. Help also comes from Vibishana, brother of Ravana, who has openly disapproved of the Titan king's conduct, and warned him of the retribution he may expect for his unrighteous actions.

Book V. (Sundara-Kanda.) The monkey armies reach the south coast of India, and, bridging the straits, gain entry into Lanka.

Book VI. (Lanka-Kanda.) After a series of pitched battles, Lanka is captured and Ravana is slain by Shri Rama. Sita demonstrates her purity and faithfulness to her husband, by successfully undergoing the ordeal by fire. The period of fourteen years' exile is by now completed, and Shri Rama returns with his consort, his brothers and allies, to the capital Ayodhya, where he begins a long and glorious reign.

Book VII. (Uttara-Kanda.) This 'later section' or epilogue, describes the doubts raised in the minds of the citizens concerning the purity of Sita, and how they compel Shri Rama to send her to Valmiki's hermitage in the forest where she gives birth to twin sons, Kusha and Lava. When these boys grow up, they return to Ayodhya and are recognized by Shri Rama, who subsequently brings Sita back to share the ruling of the kingdom with him.

This in outline is the story of the Ramayana, which, in the poetic grandeur of the original, as well as in the later Hindi work on the same theme by Goswami Tulsidas, has exerted a tremendous influence on the men and women of India. It is not only poetry of unsurpassed dramatic power and brilliance, it is a treasure-house of information on rhetoric, medicine, geology, botany, geography and every facet of the ancient civilization, with which learned scholars may interest themselves. For every Hindu, Shri Rama and Sita are the ideal man and woman, the model husband and wife. Shri Rama is an incarnation of God, the One all-pervading Principle of Truth and Intelligence, and what higher pattern for one's life could be chosen than this man of perfect virtue, a lover

INTRODUCTION

of truth, compassionate, just, benevolent, valorous and chivalrous ?

The story may also be taken as an allegory. Symbolically Rama and Ravana represent the forces of light and darkness operating in the human heart, as well as in the world. Truth, benevolence, mercy and righteousness are the forces of Light which are opposed by greed, lust, love of pleasure and power, anger and egoity. The real triumph of man means conquest of the forces of darkness. In India a festival is celebrated each year on the day traditionally held to be that on which Ravana fell and the rule of tyranny, injustice, savagery and unrighteousness ended.

Mention has already been made of Tulsidas' later Hindi epic on the life of Shri Rama, which is probably the most widely read of all in the present day. One version of the story also forms an episode in the Mahabharata and another comparatively modern treatment of it is the Adhyatma Ramayana ascribed to the Sage Vyasa.

The Sage Valmiki himself wrote a long metaphysical classic known as the Maharamayana or Yoga Vasishtha, which deals with the inner development of Shri Rama as opposed to his outer deeds and which remains one of the most authoritative and respected philosophical treatises of Vedanta.

The life of Shri Rama has entered into the consciousness of the Indian people, and much art and literature, such as Bhababhuti's dramas, draw their inspiration from it. The words of Brahma in the Ramayana have proved so far to be no idle boast : " So long as mountains and rivers have place on the earth, the story of the Ramayana will be told in the world."

The aim of the translator is to make the story known to English readers in a complete form, the first part of which is published in this volume. Although it is not possible to reproduce the beauty of the original poetic form, the true spirit of Valmiki's masterpiece is here preserved and for those who have vision, the whole significance of its spiritual purpose will be apparent.

BOOK I
BALA KANDA

CHAPTER I

Shri Narada relates to Valmiki the story of Rama

THE Sage Valmiki,¹ chief among the munis² and the most eloquent of men, constantly engaged in the practice of self-control and the study of the holy scriptures, enquired of Shri Narada :³—

“Who is there in the world to-day, endowed with excellent and heroic qualities, who is versed in all the duties of life, grateful, truthful, firm in his vows, an actor of many parts, benevolent to all beings, learned, eloquent, handsome, patient, slow to anger, one who is truly great ; who is free from envy and when excited to wrath can strike terror into the hearts of celestial beings ? O Sage, I would hear of such a man from thee, who art able to describe him to me.”

Narada, acquainted with the past, the present and the future, pleased with the words of the Sage Valmiki, answered him saying :—

“Rare indeed are those, endowed with the qualities thou hast enumerated, yet I can tell thee of such a one. Born in the family of Ikshwaku,⁴ he is named Rama ;⁴ one renowned, fully self-controlled, valorous and illustrious, the Lord of All. Wise, conversant with the ethical code, eloquent, fortunate, a slayer of his foes, broad-shouldered, long-armed, possessing a conch-shaped neck and prominent chin, eminent in archery, with a muscular body, arms extending to the knees, and a noble head and brow ; of mighty prowess ; possessing well-

¹ Valmiki. Once a robber chief, became later a fully illumined sage, author of *Ramayana*.

² Muni. A holy sage, a pious and learned person.

³ Narada. A great rishi, son of Brahma, the Creator. Many hymns of the Rig-veda are attributed to him.

⁴ Ikshwaku. Son of Manu, founder of the Solar race of kings, who reigned in Ayodhya.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

proportioned limbs and skin of bluish tint,¹ one renowned for his virtue ; of prominent eyes, deep-chested, bearing auspicious marks ; one who protects those who take refuge in him and is ever-mindful of the good of those dependent on him ; true to his promises, benevolent to his subjects, omniscient, renowned for his good deeds, pure, and ever responsive to devotion ; meditating on his own essence.

“ Equal to Brahma, the Protector of his people, pleasing to look upon ; supporting the universe ; the destroyer of those who contravene the moral code ; the inspirer of virtue ; the giver of special grace to his devotees and to those who duly observe sacrificial rites and are charitable ; conversant with the essence of the Vedic philosophy ; an adept in the science of warfare ; skilled in the scriptural law ; of infallible memory ; beloved of all ; of courteous disposition ; incapable of cowardice ; acquainted with the laws of this world as also of the other worlds.

“As the rivers hasten to the ocean, so do men of virtue ever approach him.

“ Equal to Vishnu² in valour ; grateful to the sight as the full moon ; when stirred to righteous anger, resembling all-consuming death ; in patience like the earth, in generosity like Kuvera ;³ in truthfulness the personification of virtue. Such are his great qualities—Rama, the beloved heir of King Dasaratha, possessing every excellent attribute, benevolent to all, devoted to the welfare of every living being.”

His father, King Dasaratha, made preparations to install him as his regent, but the Queen Kaikeyi, claiming the boons formerly promised to her, demanded the exile of Rama and the enthronement of her own son Bharata. The king held by his promise and by the ties of honour, sent his son Rama, whom he loved as his own life, into exile. Obeying the command of his royal sire, and in order to gratify Kaikeyi, Shri Rama went to the forest.

The son of Queen Sumitra, Prince Lakshmana, inspired by affection and humility, followed his brother Rama into exile.

¹ bluish-tint. The Incarnations or Divine Descents called Avatars are said to have the colour of a new-born cloud.

² Vishnu. The Lord as Maintainer and Supporter of the Universe.

³ Kuvera. The God of wealth.

BALA KANDA

The daughter of King Janaka, an incarnation of Lakshmi,¹ endowed with the highest feminine virtues, seeing Prince Lakshmana accompanying Rama, obedient to her lord, followed him as Venus follows the moon.

Accompanied for some leagues by King Dasaratha and his people, Rama dismissed the chariot on reaching the town of Shringavera on the banks of the Ganges, and commanded the minister Sumantra to return to the capital.

Here the prince met his beloved Guha, the chief of the Chandalas,² accompanied by whom, with Lakshmana and Sita, he crossed the river Ganges and entered the forest, arriving at length at the Chitrakuta mountain described by the Sage Bharadwaja. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita dwelt happily in the forest like devas³ or gandharvas.⁴

Overwhelmed with grief at the separation from his sons and lamenting their absence, the king departed this life, while Rama was dwelling on the Chitrakuta mountain.

The holy sages offered the throne, left vacant on the death of King Dasaratha, to Prince Bharata, who declined it, not desiring the kingdom. Setting forth to the forest where Shri Rama dwelt, in order to propitiate him, he approached that hero of truth with humility and directing his attention to the code of justice with which he was conversant, requested Rama to return and govern the kingdom.

The magnanimous, handsome and mighty Rama refused to accept the throne, preferring to carry out the command of his sire and, presenting Prince Bharata with his sandals as a symbol of authority, repeatedly exhorted him to return to the capital.

Shri Bharata, touching the feet of Rama in submission, departed and began to rule the dominion from the town of Nandigram, while eagerly awaiting the return of his brother.

The sages and hermits, who dwelt in the forest, constantly harassed by asuras,⁵ approached Shri Ramachandra to ask for his protection—Shri Rama agreed to slay the evil asuras in order to preserve the Sages who had sought his help. The holy

¹ Lakshmi. The consort of Shri Vishnu. q.v.

² Chandalas. Outcast.

³ Devas. Gods or celestial beings, literally "shining ones".

⁴ Gandharvas. Heavenly musicians.

⁵ Asuras. A race of demons.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

men, whose appearance equalled the fire in lustre, heard of Shri Rama's resolve and were assured by him of his protection.

The female asura Shurpanakha, who could assume various forms at will, was overpowered and disfigured by Rama and Lakshmana. All the wicked rakshasas¹ came led by Khara, Dushana and Trishira, to engage in combat with Shri Rama, and were slain by him. Shri Rama slew fourteen thousand rakshasas who dwelt in that forest. Hearing of the slaughter of the rakshasas, King Ravana transported with rage, took with him Maricha, a demon like himself. Maricha, knowing the superior strength of Rama, sought to dissuade Ravana from entering into combat with him, but Ravana who was marked down by destiny, disregarded the advice and went with Maricha to Shri Rama's abode. There, Maricha lured Shri Rama and Lakshmana away from the hermitage, and Ravana, having slain the vulture Jatayu, carried Sita away.

Learning from the dying Jatayu of the abduction of the daughter of the King of Mithila, Shri Rama was overwhelmed with grief and began to mourn.

Having performed the funeral rites of the vulture, while wandering in search of Sita, he encountered an asura named Kabandha whose form was menacing and terrible.

Shri Rama slew him and then performed the funeral rites whereupon his soul ascended to heaven. While passing to the celestial sphere, Kabandha spoke to Rama of Shabari, a female ascetic, and entreated him to visit her. Shri Rama, the ever resplendent Destroyer of his foes, came to where Shabari dwelt and was duly worshipped by her.

On the banks of the Lake Pampa, Shri Rama met the monkey Hanuman who presented Sugriva to him. The mighty Rama related the whole of his story to him as far as the abduction of Shri Sita. Sugriva having listened to Shri Rama entered into the rite of friendship with him, witnessed by the fire. With full faith in Rama, Sugriva then recounted to him all the sufferings he had endured through his enmity with Bali² and the great daring of the latter. Then Shri Rama vowed to

¹ Evil spirits or fiends, enemies of the gods.

² Bali or Vali—a Titan King, son of Virochana, son of Prahlada.

BALA KANDA

slay Bali, but Sugriva, uncertain of Rama's prowess and desiring to test him, showed him the bones of the body of Dundhubi,¹ forming a heap as high as a mountain. With his foot, Rama kicked the heap to a distance of ten yojanas and, discharging an arrow, pierced seven palmyra trees, cleaving a mountain and with the shaft penetrating to the centre of the earth. Having witnessed this exploit, Sugriva was satisfied, and thereafter trusted Rama implicitly. In his company he passed through deep valleys to the town of Kishkindhya ; there, the yellow-eyed Sugriva roared like thunder. At this terrible sound, the powerful and valiant monkey chief, Bali, issued forth, disregarding the warning of his wife Tara, and engaged in combat with Sugriva.

As desired by Sugriva, Shri Rama slew Bali with a single arrow ; then he entrusted the government of Kishkindhya to Sugriva who now, as king of the monkey tribe, gathered his forces together and dispatched them to every quarter in search of Sita.

The vulture chief, the courageous Sampati, informed Hanuman where Sita was, whereupon the monkey leapt over the sea that lies between Bharatvarsh² and Lanka,³ a distance of five hundred miles.

Entering the city of Lanka that was protected by Ravana, Hanuman beheld Sita, meditating on Rama in the ashoka garden. He there delivered Rama's ring to her and acquainted her with the welfare of her lord. Having revived the courage of Sita, he shattered the gate of the garden and slew seven sons of the counsellors of Ravana, five great captains and levelled Akshyakumara, the son of Ravana, to the dust. Then he suffered himself to be taken captive.

Knowing he could not be subdued by the weapon granted by Brahma to Ravana, yet acknowledging the power of its blessing,⁴ Hanuman allowed himself to be imprisoned, suffering many indignities. Subsequently he burnt the whole of Lanka, only sparing the place where Sita dwelt.

¹ Dundhubi—a giant.

² Bharatvarsh—India.

³ Lanka—Ceylon.

⁴ The God Brahma had given Ravana a weapon which entangled everyone on whom it was used so that they could not escape. It was fitting, therefore, that Hanuman, though not subject to it, should acknowledge the god's power.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Returning to deliver his welcome tidings, he respectfully circumambulated the mighty Rama and recounted in detail how he had found Sita.

Setting out in the company of Sugriva and others, Rama reached the sea. There he created a tempest by his shining arrows and the Lord of the waters, Sumudra, appeared before him. Under his direction, Nala threw a bridge over the sea. Crossing the sea by means of this bridge, Shri Rama entered Lanka, slew Ravana in battle and recovered Sita, but she being the subject of slander, was addressed by him with harsh words in the midst of the assembly. After hearing the words of Rama with forbearance, Sita entered a great fire. On the testimony of the fire god, Sita was proved to be innocent and Rama, adored by all the gods, was content.

The animate and inanimate beings of the three worlds,¹ the gods and the sages, gave thanks that Ravana had been slain by Shri Rama. Shri Rama enthroned Vibishana² as the king of the asuras and, being wholly satisfied, revived all the monkeys and asuras who had fallen in battle.

In the aerial chariot, Pushpaka, accompanied by Sugriva, Shri Rama, a devotee of truth, reached the hermitage of Bharadwaja. From there, he sent Hanuman to Prince Bharata, as his messenger and conversing with Sugriva again mounted the aerial chariot and arrived at Nandigrama.

Ever obedient to his father, Shri Rama then cut off his matted locks and with Sita occupied the throne of Ayodhya.

Seeing Shri Rama occupying the throne, the people were happy and satisfied, virtuous and free from sickness, sorrow, famine or danger. None witnessed the death of his son ; no woman became a widow and all were devoted to their husbands ; there was no danger from tempests ; none perished by water ; nor was there any cause of fear from fire ; fever and plague were unknown ; there was no want, and no danger from thieves. Cities and villages were rich and prosperous ; all lived happily as in the Satya Yuga.³

Shri Rama and Sita observed countless Vedic sacrifices and

¹ Bhur, bhuvah, swah. The lower, middle and upper worlds.

² Bibishana or Vibishana. Younger brother of Ravana, but a devotee of Rama.

³ Satya-Yuga. The golden age.

BALA KANDA

gave much gold, and hundreds of thousands of cows in charity, thus preparing for themselves a place in the divine regions. Shri Rama added incalculably to the prosperity of the dynasty, and bestowed immense wealth on the brahmins. He employed his subjects in the duties of their respective castes and ruled for eleven thousand years, after which he returned to his celestial abode, Vaikuntha.

He who reads the story of Rama, which imparts merit and purity, is freed from all sin. He who reads it with faith and devotion is ultimately worshipped together with his sons, grandsons and servants at his death.

A brahmin¹ reading this becomes proficient in the Vedas, and philosophy ; a kshatriya¹ becomes a king ; a vaishya¹ grows prosperous in trade ; a shudra,¹ on reading this will become great in his caste.

CHAPTER 2

Sage Valmiki creates the metrical form for the story

THE wise and eloquent Valmiki with his disciple, Bharadwaja, having listened to the words of Narada, was filled with wonder and worshipped Rama in his heart. He offered obeisance to Shri Narada, who craved permission to depart and on his request being granted he ascended through space to the heavens.

Narada, having departed, the great Muni Valmiki proceeded to the banks of the river Tamasa, which was close to the Ganges. Reaching that place and seeing the pure and limpid waters, Valmiki said to his disciple : " O Bharadwaja, behold how pure is the water of the holy river, verily it is clear and pleasant like the mind of a good man. O Child, set down the waterpot and fetch me my bark robe from the hermitage. I wish to bathe in the sacred stream, delay not."

Obedient to the command of his Guru,² the disciple brought

¹ The four traditional castes ; the priests, the warriors, the merchants and those who serve the other three

² Guru. Traditional spiritual preceptor.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

the raiment from the Sage's hermitage and returning speedily, offered it to him. Receiving the robe of bark from the hands of his disciple, the sage, with his senses fully controlled, girded it about him and while bathing repeated the traditional prayers, offering libations of water to his ancestors and the gods. Then he wandered about in the forest enjoying the beauties of nature.

Now the august sage, Shri Valmiki, beheld a pair of Krauncha¹ birds fearlessly disporting themselves in love. Soon after, a fowler stealing up unobserved, slew the male bird in the presence of the sage. The female bird, deprived of her yellow crested companion, who but now had been spreading his wings in the act of love to please her, perceiving him bleeding and crying out in distress, began to mourn.

The heart of the sage was filled with pity on seeing the bird struck down by the fowler. Touched by the lament of the female krauncha and incensed by the cruel act of the fowler, the sage said : " O Fowler, having killed the bird in the midst of the enjoyment of love with its mate, thou shalt never attain prosperity. Do not visit the forest for many years lest evil overtake thee."

Reflecting on the words he had addressed to the fowler and realising their implication, the sage said to himself : " What words are these that I have uttered, inspired by my compassion for the dying bird ? "

The wise and learned sage reflected a moment, and then said to his disciple : " Grieving for the dying bird, I have recited this verse of four feet, each of equal syllables, which can be sung to the vina.² May it bring me renown and may no ill be spoken of me on account of this."

With great delight the disciple committed to memory the verse composed by his spiritual preceptor, who expressed his satisfaction at the skill of his pupil Bharadwaja. Bathing in the sacred river, according to the prescribed ritual, the sage returned to his hermitage, pondering over the matter. The humble and learned disciple Bharadwaja followed the great Sage, carrying his loshta filled with water.

On entering the hermitage, the sage worshipped the Lord

¹ Krauncha. *Ardea jaculator*, a species of heron.

² Vina. A musical stringed instrument.

BALA KANDA

and performed other rituals and having instructed his disciple in the tradition and the sacred history, passed into deep meditation. The Creator of the world, the Self-born, the four-faced and glorious Brahma at length appeared before the holy sage. Valmiki rose hastily, filled with astonishment, and welcoming the Deity in great humility, offered obeisance to Him. Leading Him to a seat, in profound reverence he poured forth libations of water as enjoined in the tradition, making enquiries as to His welfare. The Blessed Lord accepted the homage offered to Him and commanded the sage to be seated. Shri Valmiki occupied the place designated by Brahma and once more recollected his grief over the incident of the wicked fowler, who ruthlessly slew the bird that was so happy and cooing with delight. He recalled the grief of the female bird and read and re-read the lines :—

“ By the ignorant and wicked fowler, grief is born
For he has wantonly slain the melodious krauncha.”

Shri Brahma, seeing the sage afflicted and sorrowful, said to him :
“ O Great Sage, let these words spontaneously uttered by thee, inspired by the death of the krauncha, be poetry. Do thou describe the whole story of Rama, who is the essence of virtue and full of the highest attributes, in accordance with what thou hast heard from Shri Narada. Do thou narrate all the known and hitherto unknown deeds of Shri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana and the asuras. Whatever relates to King Dasaratha, his wives, city, palace, sayings, conduct and what he accomplished, will be revealed to thee by my favour. None of thy words will prove false. Do thou render into verse the sacred and delightful deeds of Rama. O Sage, as long as the mountains and rivers remain on the earth, so long will the story of Shri Rama endure. So long as the story of Rama endures, so long shalt thou abide in the higher regions.”

Having uttered these words, Shri Brahma pondered awhile within Himself and then vanished from sight.

The great sage and his disciple were filled with amazement at this event, and reading the stanza again and again, their delight grew. Repeatedly reciting the couplet, composed by Valmiki, they realised that the holy sage had expressed his sorrow

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

in poetic form. Then Shri Valmiki meditated on the Lord within his soul and it occurred to him to relate the story of Rama in similar verse. For the good of the world, the illustrious and holy sage, therefore, began composing the life of Shri Rama in verse; that Rama, worthy of world-wide renown, who is both generous and charming. Shri Valmiki composed the story of the life of Rama and of the slaying of Ravana in beautiful and measured stanzas, a work of infinite merit.

CHAPTER 3

The deeds of Rama that will be described in the sacred poem

HAVING heard the story of the life of the sagacious Rama from the lips of Shri Narada which, when recounted, confers perfect righteousness on the hearer, the holy sage wished to know more concerning the sacred theme. Washing his hands and feet and drinking a little pure water, placing himself facing the east on a seat of kusha grass, with joined palms, he passed into profound meditation and in a vision beheld the history of Rama. Through the grace of Shri Brahma, the holy sage saw all that Rama, Sita and Lakshmana had experienced, observed and done. He witnessed in detail the life of Rama, who was truth incarnate and all that he had accomplished in the forest and other places.

By the power of spiritual meditation and yoga, the Sage Valmiki saw the whole past as clearly as if it were a fruit placed on the palm of his hand. Thus, having witnessed all, the most enlightened sage began to describe the life of Shri Rama in verse.

The history of Shri Rama, which confers righteousness, worldly prosperity and delight on the reader, which does not degrade the mind and grants release from sorrow, that story which charms the heart and is as full of lovely gems as is the sea, was rendered by Shri Valmiki, in the form in which Shri Narada had related it to him.

The birth of Rama, his valour, his benevolence to all men, his universal goodwill, his clemency, his pleasing looks, his

BALA KANDA

sweet disposition, his love of truth, his humility, his helpful services to the Sage Vishwamitra, the instruction given by the Sage Vishwamitra to him and his patient hearing of it; his breaking of the great bow; his marriage to Princess Sita; his controversy with Parasurama; the preparations for his coronation; a description of his great qualities; the opposition offered by Queen Kaikeyi to the coronation; his departure to the forest; the lament and death of King Dasaratha, the grief of the people of Ayodhya; Rama's speech with the ferryman; his farewell to Sumantra; his crossing of the Ganges; his visit to the holy Sage Bharadwaja; his departure for Chittrakuta on the instance of the sage; his dwelling in the leaf-thatched hut on Mount Chittrakuta; the grief of the king on Sumantra's return and the monarch's departure to heaven; the arrival of Shri Bharata at Chittrakuta to persuade Rama to return to his kingdom; his stay at the hermitage; his interview with Rama; the funeral rites of his sire; Rama's refusal to return; the receiving of Rama's sandals by Bharata as a symbol of authority; Bharata's installation of the symbol and his ruling of Ayodhya from Nandigrama; Shri Rama's visit to the Dandaka forest; his slaying of the wicked Virodha;¹ his interview with the Sage Sharabhanga; his arrival at the hermitage of Sutikshna; the meeting of Anasuya with Shri Sita and the imparting of teachings to her; the visit of the Sage Agastya; his residence at Panchavati; the meeting with Jatayu; the appearance of Shurpanakha; the conversation of Rama and Lakshmana with her; Shurpanakha's mutilation; the slaying of Khara, Dusana and Trishira; the arrival of Ravana; the slaying of Maricha; the abduction of Sita; Rama's lament on his separation from Sita; the slaying of Jatayu by Ravana; the meeting with Kabandha; the arrival at Lake Pampa; Rama's interview with Shabari; his arrival at the Rishyamukha mountain; his meeting with Hanuman; Rama's seal of friendship with Sugriva; his promise to destroy Bali; the combat between Bali and Sugriva; the slaying of Bali; the mourning of Tara; the installation of Sugriva; Shri Rama's sojourn on the mountain in the rainy season; Sugriva's exceeding of the stated time for his mission, Rama's anger against him; Lakshmana's delivery of the message

¹ Virodha. A man-eating demon.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

to Sugriva ; Sugriva's visit to Rama ; his propitiation of Rama ; the organising of the monkey army ; the dispatch of the monkeys to find Sita's abode ; the description of the earth given to them ; the giving of Rama's ring to Hanuman ; the monkeys entry into the dark cave ; their fasting on the seashore in preparation for death ; their interview with Sampati, the king of the vultures ; his information respecting Lanka ; Hanuman's leap and his crossing of the sea ; the emergence of the Minaka hill from the ocean ; the slaying of the wicked female demon Singhika who imprisoned her victims by capturing their shadow ; the appearance of Lanka by night ; the entry of Hanuman into Lanka and his lonely reflections ; his seeing of the wicked Ravana and his aerial chariot Pushpaka ; Hanuman's entry into the inner apartments, where Ravana is drinking surrounded by women ; Hanuman's search for Sita and his beholding of the princess in the ashoka garden ; Ravana's entry into the garden and his solicitation of Sita ; her reproaches ; the threatening of Sita by the female asuras ; Trijata's description of her dream concerning the delivery of Shri Rama's ring to Sita by Hanuman ; the conversation on this matter ; the gift of the jewel to Hanuman by Sita ; the destruction of the grove by Hanuman ; the flight of the women asuras ; the slaying of Ravana's guards by Hanuman ; the capture of Hanuman and the burning of Lanka by him ; the re-crossing of the sea ; the eating of the fruits of the Madhu forest ; the words of consolation offered to Shri Rama by Hanuman and the delivery of Shri Sita's jewel to him ; the arrival of Shri Rama at the seashore and the bridging of the sea by Nala and Nila ; the siege of Lanka ; the arrival of Ravana's brother Vibishana to take refuge with Shri Rama and the disclosure by him of the design to destroy Ravana ; the slaying of Kumbhakarna and Meghanada ; the destruction of Ravana ; the reunion with Sita ; the crowning of Vibishana, King of Lanka ; the offer of the aerial chariot Pushpaka by Vibishana to Rama ; the return of Shri Rama to Ayodhya ; the reunion with Prince Bharata ; the crowning of Shri Rama as king ; the farewell to the monkey army ; the rejoicings of his subjects at the coronation ; the repudiation of Sita ; these and all the other deeds of Rama on earth have been described in the sacred poem written by the blessed Valmiki himself.

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER 4

Shri Rama's sons chant the poem

WHILE Shri Rama was still King of Ayodhya, the great Sage Valmiki composed this beautiful classic.

The holy rishi composed twenty-four thousand verses and divided them into five hundred chapters and six books. In addition, he composed the epilogue. The work being completed, he reflected thus : " To whom shall I teach this classic ? "

While the sage was reflecting on the matter, the two princes, Kusha and Lava, the offspring of Rama and Sita approached him and touched his feet in reverence. The great sage studied these two virtuous princes of mellifluous speech, who dwelt with him in his hermitage at that time. Knowing them to be wise and full of faith in the teachings of the Vedas, the great sage, who had expounded the meaning of the scriptures in his verses, taught the classic to them.

The great Valmiki taught them the classic describing the deeds of Rama and Sita and all that relates to the incidents leading to the slaying of Ravana named "The Slaying of the Grandson of Poulastya ".¹ This historical classic is pleasant to sing and adapted to the three measures of time,² it is contained within the seven notes and can be sung to the vina. It expresses the various moods of love, courage, disgust, anger, terror, compassion, wonder, laughter and serenity.

The two princes were skilled musicians, proficient in rhythm and melody and had sweet voices ; they were as comely to look at as Gandharvas.³ Endowed with god-like beauty, the two sweet singers, the reflected images of Shri Rama himself, constantly repeated the holy classic and committed it to memory. The two adorable and charming princes skilfully recited the holy classic, the Ramayana, which extols virtue, before the sages, the learned brahmins and the ascetics, as they had been instructed to do.

¹ Poulastya. One of the seven great sages, born from the mind of Brahma, the Creator.

² three measures of time—slow, medium, quick.

³ Gandharvas—celestial musicians.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

On a particular occasion, the two princes, great-souled, fortunate, and equipped with all good qualities, chanted the great epic in Shri Rama's assembly. The listening sages were visibly moved and shed tears of delight. Being overcome with wonder, they cried "Excellent! Excellent", and praising the two singers, the virtue-loving sages experienced great joy. Showering praises on the brothers, they cried, "How melodiously you sing! How exquisite is the divine poem, the story of Rama!"

Being pleased with the sweet singers, one sage presented them with loshtas, another with delicious fruits, a third with robes of bark and another with antelope skins; some gave sacrificial thread, some vessels for collecting alms, others gave loin cloths, kusha grass, garments of yellow cloth, scarves and thread for binding the hair, sacrificial vessels, rosaries and axes. Others bestowed their blessings upon them, saying "May you live long" and all acclaimed the author of the marvellous poem.

They said: "This metre will be the foundation of the verse of future poets; it is composed according to specific rules; the two princes have sung this wonderful poem with great art; it will promote wisdom in those who listen to it and grant them longevity and health; it is truly able to charm the heart."

While the sages were thus praising the two princes, Shri Ramachandra, passing that way, took them to his royal palace. Occupying his golden throne, Shri Rama, the destroyer of his foes, offered hospitality and reverence to the two worthy princes. In the assembly, surrounded by his ministers and brothers, Shri Rama looked approvingly on those handsome and learned youths, and addressed the Princes Lakshmana, Shatrughna and Bharata saying: "Hear the historical poem, which these two celestial and brilliant minstrels sing, this poem which portrays incidents of wonderful meaning."

Then Shri Rama commanded the two musicians to sing and the princes tuned their vinas and chanted the poem they had learned, sweetly and clearly. The whole assembly listened to the music which was wholly gratifying to the mind and heart.

Shri Rama said: "I admire the music and the verse sung by these two minstrels who appear to be endowed with royal attributes."

BALA KANDA

In this way, praised and encouraged by Shri Ramachandra, the two brothers demonstrating their skill in music, sang on. Listening to them in the royal assembly, Shri Ramachandra was charmed.

CHAPTER 5

King Dasaratha's kingdom and capital

THE earth consisting of seven islands has been under one ruler since the time of those kings descended from Manu,¹ who were ever victorious.

Among those mighty monarchs was Sagara followed by his sixty thousand sons who hollowed out the ocean. This classic Ramayana contains the history of the House of Sagara, founded by Ikshwaku. This Rama-Katha² will be recited from beginning to end—let all listen to it with faith.

On the banks of the river Sarayu, there was a great and prosperous country named Koshala, inhabited by contented people. In it was the city of Ayodhya, famous in the three worlds, founded by the renowned Manu, a lord among men. The city's thoroughfares extended for sixty miles; its beauty was enhanced by streets admirably planned, the principal highways being sprinkled with water and strewn with flowers.

King Dasaratha protected the city as Maghavan³ protects Amaravati.⁴ He dwelt there in splendour, as Indra in heaven. The city had beautiful and massive gates and charming markets; its fortifications were planned by skilful engineers and artificers. There were bards, ballad singers and public musicians in the city; the inhabitants were wealthy and had spacious houses with high arched porticos, decorated with flags and banners. It was filled with extensive buildings and beautiful gardens,

¹ Manu from the root "man", "to think". The progenitor of mankind, created by Brahma.

² Rama-katha. The recitation of Ramayana.

³ Maghavan. A title of the Lord Indra, King of the Celestials.

⁴ Amaravati. Lord Indra's capital.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

and surrounded by mango groves, tall trees enhancing the outskirts of the city, giving it the appearance of a beautiful girl wearing a girdle of greenery. The city was enclosed by strong fortifications and a deep moat which no enemy, by any expedient whatsoever, could penetrate. Countless elephants, horses, cattle, camels and mules were to be seen in the city. Innumerable ambassadors and merchants dwelt there and people from many lands traded peacefully within its walls.

Ayodhya, like Indra's Amaravati, was resplendent with gilded palaces, the walls of which were set with precious stones, the domes resembling mountain peaks. Gem-encrusted, sky-kissing buildings could be seen throughout the royal capital. Dwelling houses, tall and fair, stood in well-placed sites and resounded with delightful music. There were lovely dwellings occupied by men of noble birth, resembling the aerial chariots that carry those of pure life and spiritual perfection to heaven.

The warriors living in that city were of those who do not slay a fleeing foe, they were skilled archers, able to pierce a target by sound alone. Many had slain tigers, lions and wolves wandering near their homes, either in single combat or with different kinds of weapons. This great city which harboured thousands of chieftains was built¹ by King Dasaratha.

In Ayodhya lived countless learned men engaged in the observance of rituals, there were also artists and craftsmen, men deeply read in the Veda and those endowed with every virtue, full of truth and wisdom, as well as thousands of seers and sages versed in the mystical science of Yoga.

CHAPTER 6

The city of Ayodhya

THERE dwelt in that city, King Dasaratha, a follower of the tradition of the illustrious Emperor Manu. The king was learned in the interpretation of the Vedas, his chief wealth was

¹ It is implied that Manu founded the original city on this site, but several cities built by other monarchs succeeded it.

BALA KANDA

pre-eminence in truth and virtue ; he was one who never broke his word, who was ever prudent, majestic and beloved of his subjects, a great charioteer, a worthy descendant of the dynasty of Ikshwaku, an observer of many sacrifices, one who ever delighted in the practice of righteousness ; in full authority over his people, equal to a great sage ; a royal seer, renowned in the three worlds, triumphing over his enemies, a friend to all ; having perfect control of his senses and appetites ; in prosperity equal to Indra ; in wealth equal to Kuvera.

That truth-loving monarch, striving to acquire perfection in virtue, worldly prosperity and happiness, ruled the city as the celestial monarch Indra rules Amaravati.

The people in that city were happy, virtuous, learned, experienced, each satisfied with his state, practising his own calling, without avarice and of truthful speech. None was indigent or dwelt in a mean habitation ; all lived happily with their families, possessing wealth, grain, cattle and horses. In that city of Ayodhya, none was a miser or a swindler, none was mean-spirited, proud, rash, worthless or an atheist. Men and women were of righteous conduct, fully self-controlled, and in their pure and chaste behaviour they equalled the great sages. None lacked earrings, coronets and necklaces. They bathed daily and rubbed their bodies with oil, using attar of roses and sandal paste. None ate impure food, none allowed his neighbour to suffer hunger. All possessed ornaments and gold, and there was none who had not learnt to subdue his mind. No one in the city neglected to offer butter and fragrant objects in the sacrificial fire. No one was mean, impious or failed to discharge his duties ; there were no thieves and none were born of mixed castes.

The brahmins were devoted to their respective duties, firm in self-control and authorized to accept gifts. None denied the existence of God, none uttered falsehood or were enamoured of worldly pleasure and none was guilty of slander. No brahmin was unversed in the six systems of philosophy nor did any neglect to fast at the full moon, or on other appointed days ; there were none who suffered from mental or physical infirmities and none were unhappy in that city.

Among the inhabitants, there were no revolutionaries and none who were not loyal to king and state. Those who dwelt

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

there, worshipped the gods and the uninvited guest ; they were both magnanimous and charitable.

All attained a ripe age as virtuous and truth-loving people ; their homes were filled with children, grandchildren and virtuous women. The warriors were subject to the learned brahmins and the merchants to the warrior caste ; in accordance with their caste the people served the brahmins, the warriors and the merchants.

In the administration of the empire, the Emperor Dasaratha followed the example of the first ruler Manu who was supreme in wisdom and a god among men.

Ayodhya abounded in warriors, undefeated in battle, fearless and skilful in the use of arms, resembling lions guarding their mountain caves.

There were horses in the city from Kamroja, Vanaya, Nudi and Vahli, and elephants from the regions of Vindhu and Himavat.

The city of Ayodhya was full of courageous and noble men belonging to the races of Bhadra, Mulla and Mriga, inhabitants of the regions of Binchyachala and the Himalayan ranges.

The city possessed mighty elephants like great hills. That capital was truly worthy of the name 'Ayodhya,' which means "The city none can challenge in warfare".

Dwelling there, the Emperor Dasaratha, ruling the kingdom, resembled the moon in the midst of countless stars. That great king, equal to Indra himself, reigned over the city, guarded by fortifications and ramparts, a city which contained innumerable dwellings of many kinds and thousands of prosperous inhabitants.

CHAPTER 7

The administration of the kingdom

EVER devoted to the welfare of King Dasaratha, the ministers of the House of Ikshwaku were possessed of all the virtues ; their counsels were based on truth and they understood the import of the royal commands immediately.

BALA KANDA

Eight of the king's counsellors were famed ; untiringly employed in the affairs of state, they were honest and devoted to the cultivation of virtue. Their names were Dhristi, Jayanta, Vijaja, Siddhartha, Atyartha-Sadaka, Ashoka, Mantra-pala and Sumantra.

The great and holy sages, Vasishtha and Vamadeva assisted the king in his observance of spiritual duties and also acted as his advisers.

All the ministers were virtuous, scorning to do wrong, benevolent, versed in the moral law, of wide experience, disinterested, magnanimous, acquainted with the spirit of the scriptures, forbearing, patient, obedient to the king, true to their word, cheerful, free from avarice and well acquainted with the affairs of their fellow subjects and with those of the subjects of other monarchs. They were efficient, firm in friendship, and even passed judgment on their own sons if they broke the law.

These counsellors were expert in the science of economics and warfare, and never inflicted unmerited punishment on an enemy. They were brave and unambitious. Conversant with every branch of political life, they protected all those who lived in the state. Adding to the royal treasury without burdening the learned and the warriors, they inflicted penalties on wrongdoers with due regard to their capacity for bearing it. These ministers were pure of heart and of chaste conduct. None consorted with his neighbour's wife, none were wicked and all lived together peaceably. Cultivating every good quality and practising the various arts, they were renowned for their courage, their fair name was published abroad and their lives were guided by reason. Skilled in the laws of the country and blessed with wealth, they issued wise edicts and exercised their minds in philosophical debate.

Acquainted with the moral code, they conversed affectionately with each other ; such were King Dasaratha's ministers who, informed by their agents of the needs of the people, satisfied them and governed with prudence.

In the administration of his kingdom, the king never permitted unrighteousness to cause dissension, and became known throughout the world as an ocean of truth. That lion among men

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

King Dasaratha, reigning over the earth, had none superior or equal to himself. Honoured by his feudal lords, surrounded by friends, King Dasaratha, like Indra, reigned in majesty.

Benevolent, powerful, accomplished and gracious, King Dasaratha protected Ayodhya and shone in splendour like the sun illumining the world.

CHAPTER 8

The king desires to perform a sacrifice for the birth of a son

KING DASARATHA, that glorious and righteous king, though performing great austerities, was without an heir to the throne. Then the wise and great-souled monarch said to himself: "I will perform the horse-sacrifice (Aswa-medha)¹ in order to have a son."

Having thus decided, the supremely sagacious sovereign convened a meeting of his counsellors and addressing his chief minister, Sumantra, commanded him as follows: "Send speedily for the spiritual preceptors and priests." Quick to act, Sumantra at once summoned those highly learned preceptors and brought thither Suyagna, Vamadeva, Javali, Kasyapa and Vasishtha together with other eminent priests and brahmins.

Having offered salutations to these holy men, King Dasaratha, speaking in gracious accents, uttered words full of truth and purpose: He said, "O Sages, I have practised virtue and yet I have not had the good fortune to be blessed with a son; it is therefore my intention to perform the horse-sacrifice. I wish to act according to the injunction of the scriptures; you, O Holy Men, advise me after due deliberation as to how I can be successful in the proposed undertaking".

¹ Aswa-Medha. A sacrifice, which in Vedic times was performed by kings. A horse, being consecrated by certain ceremonies, was let loose and allowed to wander at will followed by warriors; the ruler of any country the animal entered was bound to fight or submit; finally the horse was sacrificed with special rites.

The learned brahmins, led by Shri Vasishtha, praised the king's intention and said : " Thou hast decided on the proper course, O King." Highly pleased, they commanded those things requisite for the sacrifice to be assembled and the horse loosed. They said, " O King, let a place of sacrifice be chosen on the north bank of the river Sarayu. O King, this holy resolve formed by thee, for the sake of an heir, will assuredly bring the fulfilment of thy desire ".

Hearing the words of the brahmins, the monarch rejoiced and commanded his ministers to bring the sacrificial appointments and release the horse under the protection of the warriors ;¹ they were also directed to erect a sacrificial pavilion on the bank of the river Sarayu. He further decreed the adoption of those measures which would diminish the possibility of hindrance to the sacrifice, for even for kings, the horse-sacrifice was not easily performed.

The king said : " Let it be remembered that during the observance of the sacrifice, no suffering must be inflicted on any, lest some perverse and crafty brahmin should cause obstruction in the proceedings. By carrying through the ritual without regard for scriptural injunctions, it comes to nought ; therefore, bring the sacrifice to a successful conclusion. I depend on you, and expect you to carry the sacrifice through to a successful issue."

The counsellors replied, saying, " O King, be it so ".

Blessing the monarch, the learned brahmins retired, and the king addressed his ministers saying : " Prepare the sacrifice as the officiating priests have instructed you and accept responsibility for its final success."

Then the illustrious sovereign left the court and entered his private apartments where the queens dwelt, who loved the king from the depths of their hearts.

King Dasaratha addressed them, saying : " I intend to observe a sacrifice for the sake of obtaining a son, do you all follow the prescribed discipline." The queens rejoiced to hear these words from the lips of the king and their lotus-like faces brightened like flowers on the departure of the cold season.

¹ See note on page 22.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

CHAPTER 9

*Sumantra relates a tradition that a son will be born
through the help of the Sage Rishyasringa*

SUMANTRA, having heard of the preparations for the sacrifice, obtained a private audience with his sovereign and said : “ I have heard of a tradition, formerly related to me by the august brahmins. O King, in ancient days, the blessed Sanatkumara predicted to the holy sages around him that a son would be born to thee.

It was prophesied that a son of Kasyapa, named Vibhandaka would have a son called Rishyasringa and that he should dwell in the forest alone with his saintly father, unknown to any other man or woman.

This sage would keep the twofold vow of brahmacharya enjoined by the sages. In this way he would pass a long time worshipping God through the fire-sacrifice and the service of his sire.

In the country named Anga, a famous king named Lomapada, would oppress the people by his evil way of life and thus cause a drought. On account of this, the king would suffer great affliction and summoning the brahmins would say to them : “ O Wise Men, acquainted as you are with the customs of the world and also the divine laws, tell me what ritual of purification and repentance I can adopt to expiate my evil deeds, which have brought about this drought.”

Then the brahmins, learned in the Veda, would answer the king thus : “ O King, exert thyself by every means to bring the son of the Sage Vibhandaka hither. Having with due reverence conveyed him hither, do thou confer thy daughter Shanta on him in marriage.”

The king having listened to their words and reflected on how he should bring that excellent sage to the court, would then request his ministers and priests to approach the sage, but they would declare their unwillingness to undertake the mission, being afraid of the rishi's power.

In order to avoid the monarch's displeasure, however, after

BALA KANDA

deliberating on the method by which the sage could be brought to the court, they would make the following proposal : " By the courtesans can the sage be persuaded to come to the king's court, the rains will then follow and the drought will be at an end. Then will the king join his daughter in marriage to the sage. By pouring oblations into the sacrificial fire the illustrious sage, Rishyasringa, will, by his grace, obtain the desired son for King Dasaratha."

" Thus spoke the illustrious Sanatkumara, in the midst of the sages, and I have now recounted it to thee."

King Dasaratha was delighted to hear these words, and requested the minister to describe further how King Lomapada brought the sage to his court.

CHAPTER 10

He describes how Rishyasringa was brought to King Lomapada's court

THUS requested, Sumantra began to narrate the story in detail and said : " O Great King, hear how the ministers brought the Sage Rishyasringa to the court.

" The ministers addressed King Lomapada saying : ' We have a plan whereby the young sage may be conveyed hither successfully. He resides in the forest, devoted to holy study, spiritual practices and asceticism, and is wholly unacquainted with the pursuit of pleasure.

" ' By the means of those things gratifying to the senses, we shall most certainly be able to bring the sage to the court. Let beautifully-attired and lovely courtesans go there and by their acts, charm and bring him hither '."

The king approved the plan and commanded his ministers to carry it out.

The courtesans then entered the forest and took up their abode near the hermitage, seeking a meeting with the young sage. Protected by his father, the youthful ascetic seldom

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

passed the boundaries of the hermitage, nor had he seen any man or woman beyond its precincts.

One day, impelled by destiny, the youth went forth from the hermitage and beheld the graceful and beautiful women, attired in many-coloured robes of exquisite design, singing sweetly. They approached the son of Rishi Vibhandaka and addressed him, saying : " Who art thou ? Whose son art thou ? What is thy name ? Why dost thou dwell in the dark forest ? "

Never having beheld women of beauty and charm before, Rishyasringa was captivated and answered them, saying : " My father is the great Sage Vibhandaka of the family of Kasyapa and I am his son, my name is Rishyasringa. O Beautiful Beings of charming mien, my hermitage is near at hand, please come thither and allow me to offer you hospitality there."

The courtesans accepted the invitation and accompanied the sage who received them in the traditional manner, placing before them water to wash their feet and delicious roots and fruits.

Fearing the father's return and anxious to depart with all haste, the courtesans plied the young sage with tasty confections which they had brought with them, saying : " Be pleased to accept these dainties which we have brought for thee to enjoy on this occasion." They then caressed the youth, feeding him with sweets and other delicacies.

The resplendent sage partook of the offerings, thinking them to be fruits, never having tasted any other food.

The courtesans, fearing the father's return, pretended to be fasting and left the hermitage. At their departure, the youthful sage felt dejected and restless.

The following day, the courtesans, charmingly attired, again went to the hermitage and smiled on perceiving the young sage appear so disconsolate. They then approached him and said : " O Handsome Youth, to-day please grace our hermitage with thy presence. O Auspicious One, we can entertain thee better there than here."

The young sage agreed to accompany them and went with them to their abode. As the sage entered the city, Indra showered rain on the domain of King Lomapada and the people rejoiced.

BALA KANDA

When the rain began to fall, King Lomapada, realising that the holy sage had entered the city, went out to meet him. Offering him humble and loving salutations, he presented him with the traditional gifts (arghya)¹ of water and food, and entreated him to grant the boon that his father Vibhandaka should not visit his displeasure on him.

The king then took the youth to the inner apartments and united him in marriage to his daughter Shanta.

Deeply revered by the king, Rishyasringa lived happily in the capital with his bride, the Princess Shanta.

CHAPTER II

*King Dasaratha goes to King Lomapada, by whose permission
Rishyasringa comes to Ayodhya*

SUMANTRA said : “ O Great King, hearken further to the words of the great Sage Sanatkumara :—

“ ‘ In the House of Ikshwaku, there will be a highly righteous and truth-loving king named Dasaratha who will form an alliance with King Lomapada of Anga.

“ ‘ King Dasaratha will approach his friend Lomapada and beg the assistance of Rishyasringa, the husband of the Princess Shanta, in the performance of the sacrifice he desires to observe, that he may be blessed with a son. After mature consideration, King Lomapada will permit Shanta’s lord, Rishyasringa to accompany King Dasaratha. Highly gratified, King Dasaratha will return to his capital with Rishyasringa and will ask the sage to officiate at the sacrifice he is about to perform in order to obtain sons and also a future abode in the celestial regions.

“ ‘As a result of the sacrifice, King Dasaratha will have four sons, each of limitless valour. These sons will be renowned throughout the world and will increase the glory of their dynasty.’

¹ Arghya. A ceremonial offering of water, milk and kusha grass, rice, durva, sandalwood, flowers, etc.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

“ This story was narrated by the Sage Sanatkumara in the first quarter of Satya-Yuga.¹ O Great King ! Thou shouldst approach Rishyasringa with a worthy chariot and retinue, and bring him with ceremony to thy capital.”

Having heard the good counsel of his minister Sumantra, the King commanded him to inform his Guru Vasishtha of this matter, and the holy Vasishtha acquiesced in the plan.

Then the king, with firm resolve, attended by his queens, counsellors and priests, prepared to set forth for the city where Rishyasringa dwelt. Passing through various forests and traversing many rivers, the king arrived at Lomapada's capital. There he beheld the resplendent sage, in lustre like a glowing fire, seated near King Lomapada.

Inspired by friendship, the great monarch Lomapada offered respectful salutations to King Dasaratha and informed Rishyasringa of his alliance with this king, whereupon the sage expressed his approval in words of praise.

Having enjoyed the hospitality of King Lomapada for seven days, King Dasaratha addressed him thus : “ O King, I desire to enter upon an important undertaking, be gracious enough to allow thy daughter Shanta and her lord to return to my capital to assist me.”

Hearing these words, King Lomapada replied : “ Be it so,” and turning to the sage said : “ Be pleased to go with thy wife to the capital of King Dasaratha.”

The youthful sage assented to the command of King Lomapada, and he, in company with his spouse, departed with King Dasaratha.

Having taken leave of his friend, King Dasaratha despatched speedy messengers to go before him to instruct his ministers to prepare for their arrival.

The people of Ayodhya carried out all as they had been commanded and overjoyed at the monarch's return, fulfilled the instructions of his messengers. The citizens were delighted to behold the young sage entering the city and being honoured by the king, as Indra in heaven pays tribute to Kasyapa.

Having introduced the sage and his consort to the inner

¹ Satya-Yuga—the Golden Age. There are four yugas in the world cycle—Satya or Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali, the golden, silver, copper, and iron age.

BALA KANDA

apartments, the king offered him the traditional welcome as enjoined in the scriptures.

The royal ladies also welcomed the wide-eyed Shanta with her lord to the private apartments, and expressed their pleasure and delight.

Honoured and worshipped by the queens, no less than by King Dasaratha himself, the Princess Shanta and her husband, the sage, dwelt in the palace as Brihaspati¹ resides in the city of Mahendra.

CHAPTER 12

Rishyasringa agrees to assist in the sacrifice

TIME passed and the spring came again while the holy sage was at the court of King Dasaratha. On a propitious day, the king decided to enter upon the sacrifice.

He approached Rishyasringa and, bowing low, offered salutations to him, inviting that god-like sage to assist in the sacrifice he was observing, to preserve the dynasty. The sage agreed and requested the king to provide the necessary material for the sacrifice and to let loose the horse.

The sovereign commanded his minister Sumantra to summon with all speed the priests acquainted with the philosophy of the Veda, and sent invitations to the sages Vamadeva, Javali, Kasyapa, the high priest Vasishtha and other exalted and learned brahmins.

Sumantra, setting out in haste, approached the sages courteously and brought them to the king. The virtuous monarch, after paying respectful homage to them, addressed them humbly, speaking words full of candour and integrity.

He said : " O Sages, despite my ardent desire to have an heir, I am without one. I have, therefore, decided to perform the horse sacrifice to that end. I desire the sacrifice to be observed according to the scriptural laws and through the grace of the Sage Rishyasringa, I hope to attain my purpose."

¹ Brihaspati. The Guru of the gods, also the regent of the planet Jupiter.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

The sages advised the king to gather together the sacrificial articles and to release the horse.

They said : " Righteous is thy desire to be blessed with a son ; O King, thou shalt surely obtain four illustrious sons of limitless valour."

The brahmins' words convinced the king that heirs would be granted to him and he communicated his satisfaction to his ministers. He said : " O Counsellors, bring together four high priests and set the horse at liberty under the protection of four hundred warriors. Let a sacrificial pavilion be set up on the bank of the river Sarayu, and let appropriate protective rites be observed lest obstructions arise."

The king then ordained that during the period of sacrifice neither priests nor other persons should be subject to any suffering whatsoever. He said : " In such rites, others have been impeded by sub-human beings, which has resulted in the annulment of the sacrifice. You should, therefore, employ every means to bring the sacrifice to a successful conclusion."

Hearing the words of the king, the ministers—highly gratified—began to act according to his instructions. Then the brahmins assured the king that the sacrifice would be accomplished without hindrance and offering him obeisance, returned to their homes.

The brahmins having departed, the king bade farewell to his ministers and entered his private apartments.

CHAPTER 13

The Sacrifice is commenced

THE following year, spring having returned once more, the king, desiring to complete the sacrifice for the sake of an heir, paid homage to Shri Vasishtha, offering him humble salutations according to the prescribed ordinance, and addressed that great brahmin with submission, saying :—

BALA KANDA

"O Great Sage, be pleased to complete the holy ceremony according to the sacred tradition. Let it be so undertaken that no interference may take place. Thou art compassionate and thy heart is inclined towards me. Thou art also my Guru, the burden of the sacrifice must be borne by thee."

The most excellent sage replied, "Be it so. I will do as thou desirest."

Hereafter, Shri Vasishtha summoned those brahmins, able to perform the holy rituals and also artificers, architects, writers, actors and dancers.

Addressing the learned priests, he said: "At the king's command, inaugurate the great sacrifice. Cause bricks in thousands to be brought hither with all speed and erect many kinds of dwellings, well arranged, furnished with food and every comfort to accommodate royal and other guests. Prepare hundreds of beautiful houses on suitable sites, together with provisions and all things needed by brahmins; erect also large buildings for the people of other lands, and store food and articles of comfort where it is best to do so. Fine and well-equipped houses should be built for villagers. Ensure that hospitality in the form of food and refreshment be given with courtesy and kindness. Those attending the sacrifice should be entertained with respect and consideration, being received in a becoming manner, according to their caste. Let no affront be offered to any through greed, anger or lust. Let craftsmen and servants be suitably regarded, so that their hearts be set on their task and let no one act disruptively. Treat all in a spirit of goodwill and courtesy, so that the work may be successfully accomplished."

The people listened to the holy sage and answered, "We will act according to thy instructions, O Sage, nothing shall be omitted."

Shri Vasishtha then summoned the chief minister Sumantra and said: "Send out invitations to the sacrifice to all the righteous kings of the earth and also the brahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras of every country, but go first to the great Sovereign of Mithila, the heroic Janaka, eminent in truth, the greatest of warriors and a knower of the Veda, since he is an ancient ally of King Dasaratha. Thereafter, bring the ever-

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

truthful King of Kashi, of exemplary conduct, equal to a god ; and then the aged and virtuous King of Kaikeya, our sovereign's father-in-law, and invite his son also. Call the fortunate King Lomapada of Anga, the intimate friend of the King, and bring hither, with respect, Koshala, the King of Magadha.

"Thereafter, send messengers to the kings of the eastern countries of Sindhu, Souriva, and Sourashtra, and the monarchs of the south, with other great kings of the earth ; let them come with their brothers, relations, retainers and servants."

Having heard the words of Shri Vasishtha, Sumantra carried out the instructions given by him, dispatching invitations by special messengers to the monarchs of many lands, himself going forth to escort some of the great kings.

Sumantra having departed, all the workers employed in the sacrifice informed the holy sage of their progress, and he advised them further saying : "Let nothing be presented to any without due respect, even in jest ; gifts given with contempt lead to the destruction of the giver."

A few days later, the kings from afar arrived at the sacrificial pavilion bearing gifts of gems.

Then Shri Vasishtha, being pleased, said : "O King, at thy command, all the kings have come and been received by me with due hospitality. The preparations for the sacrifice are now completed, be pleased to enter the sacrificial pavilion and inspect the articles needed for the ceremony. See how well thy servants have furnished everything requisite and have gratified thy every wish."

On the recommendation of the Sage Vasishtha and Rishyasringa, King Dasaratha went to the sacrificial ground at an auspicious time, when a propitious star was in the ascendant. Then the learned brahmins and Shri Vasishtha elected Rishyasringa as chief priest.

The sacrifice began in accordance with the ancient ordinance and the king, with his queens, engaged in the preliminary initiations.

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER 14

The Ceremonies are performed with the appropriate rites

HAVING ranged far and wide during a year, the horse returned and on the bank of the river Sarayu the sacrifice of King Dasaratha continued. The chief priests, under Rishyasringa, assisted the king in the observance of the rituals. Brahmins learned in the ancient science, also officiated and assisted the king according to the instructions laid down in the Kalpa Sutra.

The two special portions of the sacrifice *Pravargya* and *Upasada* were duly observed ; then the brahmins worshipped the gods with joy. The illustrious sage performed certain rituals and offered Indra the part of the sacrifice due to him. Thereafter all partook of the soma-juice which destroys every sin.

The high-souled king duly undertook the third portion of the ceremony with the assistance of the holy brahmins. In the sacrifice, no oblation was omitted and none wrongly offered in the sacred fire. All that was done was correctly carried out under the supervision of the sages.

During the period of sacrifice, no brahmin experienced hunger or thirst. Countless priests were present and each was attended by hundreds of disciples. Workers, servants and other classes were feasted like the brahmins, and monks and ascetics were provided for abundantly.

The aged, the children, and the women were served with all they cared to eat, and those who attended on them were willing and pleasant.

By the king's command, apparel, money and other gifts were freely distributed with immeasurable generosity. Mountains of cooked and uncooked foods were to be seen and each could have what he required, to suit his needs. Men and women from many lands were daily entertained with food and drink. From every side, the king heard the exclamations "How delicious is the food, we are well content".

Servants and retainers gorgeously clad and wearing golden earrings, attended on the brahmins, while others adorned with jewels served other castes.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

In the interval between the two parts of the sacrifice, eloquent and learned pundits debated metaphysical problems and vied with each other in the display of wisdom and acumen.

Day by day, the sacrificial ceremonies were carried out by learned and holy priests. There were none assisting at the holy ritual who were illiterate or unacquainted with the Vedas.

Each attendant of the king was inspired by exalted principles and all were highly eloquent and deeply versed in the scriptures.

Eighteen pillars of wood were set up in the place of sacrifice, each made of a different kind of timber. Priests, skilled in the art of sacrificial rites, overlaid them with gold. Each of the eighteen columns was twenty-one feet in height, polished and of octangular shape and all were firmly fixed in the earth and covered with embroidered cloths. In addition, they were adorned with sandalwood and flowers and looked as beautiful as the constellation of the seven sages,¹ in the sky. Sacrificial pits were constructed by master masons and the fire kindled by brahmins.

The sacrificial pit prepared for King Dasaratha was formed like a great eagle in gold, its wings set with gems.

The beasts to be sacrificed to each particular deity were bound according to scriptural injunction. There were birds, snakes and horses, and according to tradition, the chief priest bound the aquatic animals, such as turtles, in the sacrificial pavilion. Three hundred beasts and the horse which had roamed over the earth were assembled.

Queen Kaushalya joyfully paid reverence to the horse before making the sacrifice with three strokes of the sword. Prompted by righteous desire, Queen Kaushalya passed the night watching over the dead body of the horse, then the priests caused the king's serving women and the courtesans to approach it.

The twice-born of subdued senses cooked the fat of the horse on the fire in the manner prescribed by the shastra. King Dasaratha inhaling the odour emitted by the fat, acknowledged and expiated his sins. Sixteen assistant priests made offerings of parts of the horse into the fire, in spoons fashioned of cane, plaksha wood being used in other sacrifices. At the horse

¹ The Plough, each star of which is said to be presided over by one of the immortal sages.

BALA KANDA

sacrifice, three days of special rituals are observed : during the first day the *Agnistona* is performed ; during the second day, the *Uktha* rite, during the third day the *Atiratra* rite. The great sacrificial acts named *Jyotishtoma*, *Agnishtona*, *Atiratas*, *Abhijit*, *Vishnajit* and *Aptoryama* are also observed.

King Dasaratha, the promoter of his dynasty, on the conclusion of the sacrifice, gave away four parts of his kingdom, as *dakshina*¹ to the four priests. The king distributed alms following the great example of Swayambhumanu of old. The sacrifice being concluded, that great monarch gave large portions of the earth in charity, to the officiating priests, and finally that magnanimous sovereign bestowed the whole kingdom on the assisting priests.

Then the holy brahmins addressed that sinless monarch, saying : " O Lord of Men, we are not able to protect, defend and administer this vast empire, for we have dedicated ourselves to holy study. Therefore, O Great King, we render back these lands to thee, grant us in return some lesser gift, be it gems, gold or coins to help us in our hermitages."

Thus addressed by the learned brahmins, the king bestowed on them a hundred million pieces of gold, and four hundred million silver coins. Then the assisting priests placed all the king's gifts before the holy sages, Vasishtha and Rishyasringa and begged them to distribute them.

Each one received his just share and the priests were highly pleased and well satisfied. The king gave away gold coins to those who had come to witness the sacrifice and ten million gold coins were bestowed on other brahmins present at that time. A needy mendicant begged for the diamond studded bracelet worn by the king himself and it was freely bestowed on him.

Beholding the brahmins fully satisfied, King Dasaratha with great gladness made obeisance to them again and again.

The twice-born then bestowed their blessings on the king who was exceedingly liberal and valorous and who saluted them by prostrating himself on the earth.

Thus ended the great sacrifice, the means of destroying sin and attaining heaven and scarcely to be accomplished by other monarchs.

¹ *Dakshina*. Gifts of charity given at the conclusion of a ceremony.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Then the king addressed Rishyasringa and said : “ O Thou of great and virtuous resolve, tell me what further must be done by me to be blessed with an heir ? ”

The Sage Rishyasringa replied : “ O King, thou shalt be blessed with four sons, who will perpetuate the royal line.”

CHAPTER 15

To destroy Ravana, Shri Vishnu resolves to incarnate

THE wise Rishyasringa, versed in the Scriptures, meditated for a while and then spoke to King Dasaratha saying :—

“ O King, I will perform the sacrifice Puttatrestī,¹ spoken of in the Atharva Veda, which will assist thee in thy endeavour to obtain a son.”

Then the sage inaugurated the sacrifice and poured oblations into the sacred fire accompanied by the chant of Vedic mantras.

The celestial beings, gandharvas, siddhas² and sages assembled to obtain their portion of the sacrifice. After the sacrifice, they all approached Shri Brahma, the Lord of mankind and with joined palms addressed him :—

They said : “ O Blessed Lord, having been favoured by thee, the Asura Ravana, perpetually troubles us who are helpless, since thou hast granted great boons to him and we are forced to bear his fearful oppression.

“ This Lord of Rakshasas has persecuted the three worlds and having overthrown the guardians of the earth, he has even humbled Indra himself. Provoking the sages, contemplatives, brahmins and the gods, he even controls the sun’s rays and the wind’s power, even the ocean in his presence is still. At his approach, O Blessed Lord, we are terrified. O Giver of Boons, be pleased to bring about his destruction.”

Hearing these words, Brahma reflected for a while and

¹ Puttatrestī. The sacrifice to extend the race by having sons.

² Siddhas. Semi-divine beings that dwell in the region between the earth and the sun.

BALA KANDA

answered : " I have devised a plan for slaying this wicked tyrant. It was granted to Ravana that no gandharva, yaksha or deva should be able to slay him, but thinking man to be of no account, he did not ask to be made invulnerable in regard to him ; therefore, none but man can destroy him."

These words, uttered by Shri Brahma filled the celestial and other beings with joy.

At this time the immortal Vishnu, with conch, disc and mace, the Overlord of the whole world, clad in a yellow robe, appeared at that place. Adored by the gods, he drew near and took his seat by Shri Brahma, then all the gods addressed him saying :—

" O Madhusudana¹, for the good of all beings, we entreat Thee, to be born as heir to the supremely righteous, charitable and illustrious Sage Dasaratha. Appear, O Lord, in the form of four sons to the three consorts of that great king. Descending into a human body, do thou slay Ravana, the scourge of the universe, whom we are unable to destroy. That ignorant Ravana, by his power, afflicts the devas, siddhas and sages. O Lord, that wicked asura, sporting in the garden of Indra, has slain countless nymphs and gandharvas. In company with the sages, we approach Thee so that we may be released from this oppression. We take refuge in Thee, Thou art our only asylum ! O Lord, we beseech Thee to take birth as man in order to destroy the enemy of men and gods."

Thus did the gods appeal to Shri Vishnu and He, adored by the world, answered them who had taken refuge in Him :—

" O Devas, fear no more, peace be with you. For your sake, I will destroy Ravana, together with his sons, grandsons, counsellors, friends and relatives. Having slain that cruel and wicked asura, the cause of fear to the divine sages, I will rule in the world of mortals for eleven thousand years."

Thus did Shri Vishnu grant a boon to the gods, and then reflected as to where on the earth he should take birth as man.

Then the lotus-eyed Lord resolved to become incarnate as the four sons of King Dasaratha.

The celestial sages, the heavenly musicians and the nymphs

¹ Madhusudana. Slayer of Madhu. (A demon.)

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

praised the Lord saying : “ O Universal Sovereign, destroy the wicked asura, who is arrogant, powerful and vain, the enemy of Indra and the scourge of the ascetics and pious men, one who strikes terror into every heart, causing universal lamentation.

“ Destroy, O Lord, this mighty being, together with his army, generals, relatives, friends and followers, remove the cause of the world’s woe and then return to thy perfect abode.”

CHAPTER 16

He decides to incarnate as the four sons of King Dasaratha

THE Omniscient Lord, Shri Narayana,¹ listened to the praise offered by the gods and honouring them, uttered words of pleasing import to them.

He said : “ O Devas, by what means may the King of the Asuras be slain, that thorn in the side of holy men ? ”

The gods with one accord answered the imperishable Lord, crying : “ Do Thou become incarnate in the form of man and slay him in open fight. O Conqueror of Thy foes, Ravana has long practised austerities, by means of which he has won the favour of the world-revered Brahma. That deity has granted him a boon, by which he is rendered invulnerable to all but man. Considering man of no account, he does not fear him. The boon bestowed on him by Shri Brahma has made him arrogant and he is bringing destruction to the three worlds and carrying off women by violence. Therefore, O Lord, man alone can bring about his death.”

Hearing the words of the gods, Shri Vishnu resolved to choose King Dasaratha as his sire.

At that time, the illustrious King Dasaratha, the slayer of his foes, began to observe the sacrifice in order to obtain an heir. Shri Vishnu, having formed his resolution to appear in human form and concluded his deliberations with Shri Brahma, vanished.

¹ Narayana. A name of Shri Vishnu, “ He whose abode is the water ”.

Forthwith there issued from King Dasaratha's sacrificial fire to the sound resembling the beating of a drum, a great Being of limitless splendour, of glowing countenance, clad in red and hairy as a lion. Bearing auspicious marks and adorned with beautiful ornaments, his height was equal to the peak of a mountain. Striding boldly like a lion, his form shone as fire. In both hands he carried, as would a beloved spouse, a vessel of gold, with a silver cover, filled with payasa.¹

This great Being addressed the king saying : " O King, I come from Prajapati.² The king bowing down with joined palms, answered : " Thou art welcome, O Lord, what orders hast thou for me ? "

Then the Being replied : " Receive the fruit of thy sacrifice ! O Chief of Men, accept this dish of payasa prepared by the gods, it will bring thee sons and increase thy power. Let it be eaten by thy consorts, they will then present thee with the heirs for whose sake thou hast performed the sacrifice."

The king received the food contained in the golden vessel prepared by the gods and reverently raised it to his forehead. Having received the divine repast, he rejoiced as a penniless man on obtaining wealth.

Forthwith that wonderful and resplendent being vanished, having offered the consecrated food to the king.

The tidings of this great event caused the consorts of King Dasaratha extreme delight and they appeared as radiant as the beams of the moon irradiating the autumnal sky.

Entering the private apartments, the king addressed Queen Kaushalya, saying : " Receive this food and partake of it that thou mayest have a son."

Thereafter, the monarch gave half of the dish to Queen Kaushalya and one-third to Queen Sumitra. Then he gave the eighth of the payasa to Queen Kaikeyi and, after reflection, the remainder to Queen Sumitra. In this way, the King divided the dish of payasa among his three queens.

On partaking of the food, the beautiful queens were overjoyed and considered themselves most fortunate.

Having consumed the payasa presented to them by the king,

¹ Payasa. A special preparation of rice in milk.

² Prajapati. A name of Brahma, the Creator.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

the queens soon became pregnant, their wombs glowing like the fire in the sun.

The illustrious sovereign perceiving that the wombs of his consorts were quickened and that his great desire was about to be fulfilled, was filled with supreme joy, as is Shri Vishnu when worshipped by the gods and perfect beings in the celestial region.

CHAPTER 17

*To assist Shri Vishnu, celestial beings incarnate as warriors
of the monkey tribe*

SHRI VISHNU having become the sons¹ of King Dasaratha, the divine Brahma thus addressed the gods: "The blessed Lord Vishnu, the Ocean of Truth is engaged in a just undertaking for the good of all, you should therefore support Him by becoming incarnate as great beings in the monkey tribe, skilled in the arts of magic, swift as the wind, conversant with the dictates of virtue, wise and equal in might to the Lord, invincible, endowed with celestial bodies and skilful in the science of warfare. Some among you should assume the forms of nymphs, gandharvas and female ascetics who will give birth to heroes in the monkey tribe.

"In the past, when I yawned, the great bear, by the name of Jambavan, issued from my mouth."

The gods thus instructed by the blessed Lord, caused warriors to be born in the monkey tribe from the wombs of countless celestial beings.

Indra created Bali, the Sun created Sugriva; Brihaspati created the wise Tara, Kuvera begat Gandha-madana,² Vishwakarma³ begat the mighty ape Nala, Agni begat Nila, who was as resplendent as fire and in valour surpassed his father.

¹ Sons. The Lord was partially manifested in all the sons of King Dasaratha.

² Gandha-madana. A general of the monkey allies of Rama.

³ Vishwakarma. The architect of the gods.

BALA KANDA

The Aswini-Kumaras¹ produced Minda and Dvividā ; Varuna² begat Suchena ; Megha,³ was the father of Sharabha, the mighty ; Pavana⁴ begat the warrior called Hanuman, whose body was as hard as a diamond and whose speed equalled an eagle's ; he excelled all the other warriors in wisdom and power.

There were thousands of warriors born in the monkey tribe ready to destroy Ravana. All the bears, monkeys and chimpanzees resembled the god that had produced them in characteristics, habits and prowess, and many were of outstanding valour. The female chimpanzees and bears gave birth to great beings of divine nature. They produced hundreds and thousands of healthy progeny. These dwellers of the forest were imposing in form and in strength and fearlessness resembled lions and tigers. All were able to cleave rocks and mountains and fight with their nails and teeth. Skilled in every kind of weapon, they could shake great peaks, uproot the stoutest trees and by their velocity even put the sea god to shame. Able to tear up the earth with their feet and cause the ocean to overflow, they could fly in the air and even seize the clouds.

These beings of the monkey tribe wandered in the woods, making captive the elephants, and by their shouts causing the birds in flight to fall to the ground. Thus were born millions of monkeys, able to assume any form, together with hundreds and thousands of monkey chiefs.

These chiefs begot other brave and powerful beings, some of whom dwelt on the mountains while others inhabited the valleys and forests.

The two brothers, Sugriva, the offspring of Surya,⁵ and Bali, the son of Indra, became the leaders of all the monkeys. Others lived under the command of group leaders, such as Nala, Nila and Hanuman. They were as strong as eagles and skilled in every sort of warfare.

Wandering about the forest, they slew lions, tigers and

¹ Aswini-kumaras. Gods, sons of the sun, precursors of the dawn, also the patrons of medicine.

² Varuna. The Hindu Neptune.

³ Megha. The Regent of the clouds.

⁴ Pavana. Lord of the winds.

⁵ Surya—the sun.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

poisonous snakes. The powerful long-armed Bali protected the monkeys, bears and chimpanzees by his prowess. These heroes, invincible as mountains and of immense size, born to assist Shri Rama, filled the earth.

CHAPTER 18

King Dasaratha's sons are born and grow to manhood

WHEN the sacrifice of King Dasaratha had been brought to a successful conclusion, the gods, receiving their due portions, returned to their abode.

The king also, having fulfilled the obligations incurred by his initiation, returned to the capital with his queens, servants, army and vehicles.

The royal guests to whom due hospitality had been shown, made obeisance to the Sage Vasishta and returned to their homes. When they departed, ornaments, apparel and gifts were distributed to their armies who set out for their own cities with joy.

King Dasaratha attended the departure of his guests and then re-entered the capital in a procession preceded by the holy brahmins.

Rishyasringa with his wife Shanta then took leave of the monarch and departed to his own city, King Dasaratha accompanying him for some distance. Then the king, expecting to be blessed with an heir, dwelt happily in Ayodhya.

Six seasons after the completion of the sacrifice, in the twelfth month, on the ninth day of the moon of Chaitramas, the star Punarvasu was in the ascendant, and the planets, the Sun, Mars, Saturn, Jupiter and Venus were exalted, and those signs of the zodiac, such as the Ram, the Fishes, and the Scales in auspicious aspects, the moon and Jupiter being in conjunction at the period called Karka. Then the world-honoured Lord of the World, endowed with divine attributes, Shri Ramachandra was born of the womb of Kaushalya.

BALA KANDA

The Promoter of the glory of the House of Ikshwaku, the blessed Lord Vishnu was born as a son of Queen Kaushalya. When this child of limitless splendour was born, the queen looked most beautiful, like Aditi of old, favoured by Indra.

The hero of the realm of truth, Bharata, was born of Queen Kaikeyi. Possessed of every grace, he was endowed with a quarter of the glory of Shri Vishnu.

Sumitra gave birth to Lakshmana and Shatrughna, heroes skilful in the wielding of weapons and also partaking of Shri Vishnu's glory.

Bharata was born when the star Pushya was in the ascendant in the Lagna Meena.¹ During the ascendancy of the star Shlasi in the Lagna Karka,² at the time of sunrise Shatrughna was born.

Each of the sons of the king had special attributes and were endowed with great qualities, they were as resplendent as the Purva,³ Uttara⁴ and Bhadrpata⁵ stars.

At that time gandharvas played divine melodies, nymphs danced, celestial drums were heard and the gods showered flowers from the sky.

Everywhere in the capital, signs of rejoicing were apparent ; the streets were filled with actors and dancers and those who sang or played on various instruments.

The king gave gifts to the bards and ballad singers and conferred wealth and cows on the brahmins.

The four children were named on the twelfth day ; the eldest son received the name Ramachandra, and the name given to the son of Queen Kaikeyi was Bharata.

The sons of Queen Sumitra were called Lakshmana and Shatrughna. The ceremony was performed by the holy Sage Vasishtha with great joy. After this, the brahmins of the capital and the country were feasted and presented with gifts and precious gems.

Resembling the deity Shri Brahma, the king showed universal

¹ Lagna Meena—Pisces.

² Lagna Karka—Cancer. Lagna is the point where the horizon and the path of the planets meet.

³ Purva—Star of the East.

⁴ Uttara—Northern Star.

⁵ Bhadrpata—One of the Lunar Asterisms.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

benevolence. The princes grew in the knowledge of the Veda, in courage and active goodwill to all. Though each was wise, learned and possessed of every virtue, yet Shri Ramachandra excelled them in truthfulness and energy, and was beloved of all, like the flawless orb of the moon. Expert in mounting the elephant, the horse and the chariot, he was skilful in archery and devoted to the service of his parents.

Shri Lakshmana cherished an exceeding love for his elder brother Shri Ramachandra, the delight of the world, and Shri Rama loved him also as his very self. Shri Ramachandra loved Lakshmana who was endowed with every excellent quality, as his own life, and neither slept nor partook of any nourishment without the other.

When Raghava mounted on horseback, engaged in the chase, Shri Lakshmana followed with bow and arrows to protect him.

Emulating the example of Shri Ramachandra, Bharata loved Shatrughna and was loved by him with equal affection.

The monarch was as pleased and satisfied with his four sons as is Shri Brahma with the four Vedas. Observing the wisdom, prudence and modesty of his children, who were endowed with every great attribute, King Dasaratha derived as great a delight from them as Brahma from the four guardians of the earth.

The princes studied the Veda with perseverance, affectionately attended on the king and acquired proficiency in the use of arms.

One day when the illustrious sovereign was in council with his relatives, ministers, and learned preceptors, deliberating on the marriage of his four sons, the great Sage Vishwamitra appeared in the capital. Seeking an audience with the king, he addressed the doorkeeper, saying : " Inform the king speedily that the son of Gadhi of the race of Kaushika is at the gate." The awe-stricken guard hastened to the royal apartment and conveyed the tidings with due respect to his majesty, who with his Guru Vasishtha went forth to welcome the sage at the gate and bring him into the royal palace.

As Brahma welcomes Indra, so did they greet the muni, and beholding that resplendent and mighty ascetic, the observer of great vows, of cheerful countenance, the king offered him arghya according to the prescribed tradition.

BALA KANDA

The virtuous Vishwamitra then enquired of the king concerning the welfare of the empire, the prosperity of his people, relatives and friends and also as to the state of the royal treasury. Thereafter, the sage questioned the monarch further, saying : "Are thy vassals obedient to thee ? Are thine enemies subdued ? Are the Vedic sacrifices duly observed in thy dominion ? Are strangers entertained with fitting hospitality ?" Then after enquiring as to the well-being of Shri Vasishtha and other sages, Shri Vishwamitra entered the palace.

Here the king once more paid him reverence and with delight addressed him saying : " O August Sage, thy coming has caused me as great a joy as the acquisition of ambrosia or the advent of rain falling on the parched earth. O Sage, thy approach is as grateful to me as the birth of a son to one without an heir or the recovery of his wealth to one who imagined it to be irretrievably lost. O Mighty Sage, I welcome thee with my whole heart, say what commands thou hast for me ? When thy glance doth fall upon me, O Sage, I become righteous and acquire merit ; to-day my life is rendered fruitful and the purpose of my birth is accomplished since thou hast visited me. O Auspicious One, formerly thou wast a warrior sage, illustrious by virtue of thy sacred practices, but now thou art become a brahmin¹ and art worthy of supreme worship by me. Thine advent has conferred purity and blessing on me, and by thy sacred presence both the kingdom and I have been purged of every offence. Be pleased to tell us of the purpose of thy coming, I desire to manifest my gratitude to thee by rendering thee service. O Kaushika, do not hesitate to speak thy will, I am ready to do anything for thee ; thou art to me as a god. O Brahman Seer, by beholding thee, I have acquired the great merits of a pilgrimage."

Hearing the words of King Dasaratha, sweet sounding and in accordance with the scriptural injunctions, the great sage, the repository of all excellent qualities, was highly gratified.

¹ Vishwamitra was originally of the warrior class and won brahminhood by his asceticism. His story follows later.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

CHAPTER 19

Vishwamitra's request

HEARING the laudatory and admirable words of that Lion among kings, Dasaratha, the great Sage Vishwamitra answered : " O Great King, who in the world save one of the House of Ikshwaku, instructed by Shri Vasishtha, could give tongue to such utterances ? O Illustrious Monarch, I will now unfold my purpose, do thou fulfil it and prove the truth of thy words.

" O Chief of Men, when I undertake the observance of sacred sacrifices to enhance my perfection, two rakshasas, adepts in magic, create great impediments. When, after long effort, the sacrifice approaches consummation, then these two rakshasas, Maricha and Suvahu destroy the rite and defile the altar with blood and flesh. My holy endeavours being thus frustrated, I become despondent and leave the place of sacrifice. O King, it is not permitted to me to show wrath when engaged in sacrifice, and I therefore refrain from cursing them. Do thou lend me the services of thy son, Shri Ramachandra, the truthful, the brave, that hero, whose locks fall on his cheeks.

" Under my protection, he will destroy those mischievous rakshasas and I will confer great blessings on him. I will instruct him for his good in many sciences and he will become famous in the three worlds. The rakshasas will not be able to stand against Rama and no one else can destroy them. They are proud and powerful, but now, owing to their sins, their destruction is imminent, they will not be able to withstand Shri Ramachandra,

" Do not allow a father's affection to overcome thee ; I assure thee that in the presence of Shri Ramachandra, the rakshasas are as good as slain. Rama's virtues are known to Shri Vasishtha and other ascetics. O King, if thou seekest everlasting renown and merit in this world, then let Shri Rama go with me. Seek the advice of Shri Vasishtha and thy counsellors and if they approve the project, give me Ramachandra. Be pleased, O King, to give up thy beloved son for the space of ten days, so that I may complete the sacrifice. O King, help me in

BALA KANDA

furthering my sacrifice, and do not let the allotted time pass in vain. Do what is auspicious, do not grieve."

The upright and resplendent Sage Vishwamitra having uttered these righteous words, became silent.

The words of Shri Vishwamitra filled the king with anxiety and he became distraught. Because of these inexorable words, the monarch trembled and fell unconscious from his seat overcome with grief.

CHAPTER 20

The king's reluctance to allow Shri Rama to contend with Maricha and Suvahu

FOR some time the king lay insensible, then regaining consciousness he said : " My lotus-eyed Rama is but fifteen years old, I cannot believe he is capable of contending with the rakshasas. I possess a large and well-equipped army and will myself lead it against the demons. My seasoned warriors, who are courageous and skilled in bearing weapons and who are suitably remunerated by me, are fit to fight the rakshasas in battle ; therefore, do not ask for Rama. I myself, bearing my bow and arrows, will lead the army in the field and fight to my last breath. With this protection, thy sacrifice will come to a successful conclusion. I will go thither in person, do not take away Shri Ramachandra. Shri Rama is still a child without military experience, he cannot estimate the strength or weakness of the enemy, he has not yet acquired proficiency in warfare.

" Thou knowest well, O Sage, how crafty are the rakshasas in combat. Shri Ramachandra is not capable of opposing them successfully. I cannot bear the thought of Ramachandra contending with them. O Sage, I shall not live, even for a moment, if Shri Rama be separated from me, therefore, I entreat thee, do not ask for him. Should'st thou insist on Rama accompanying thee, then take my forces also with thee. O August Vishwamitra, recollect I pray thee that I am now nine

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

thousand years old and have begotten these sons with great difficulty. These princes are dearer to me than life itself and Shri Ramachandra is the dearest of them all. Excelling in virtue, he is my eldest son, therefore, do not take him from me. O Great Sage, how powerful are these rakshasas? Who are their supporters and how dost thou imagine Shri Rama can destroy them? O Blessed Lord, say if thou deemest that I and my army may successfully oppose those rakshasas who are skilled in magic?"

Shri Vishwamitra answered: "O King, Ravana, born of the great family of Poulastya, having been favoured by Brahma with a boon, is oppressing the three worlds. He is exceedingly powerful and supported by many asuric followers. It is said that this great warrior Ravana is the King of Asuras. He is the brother of Kuvera and the son of the Sage Vishravas. He does not obstruct the lesser sacrifices in person, but two mighty rakshasas named Maricha and Suvahu, prompted by him, disrupt the sacrificial rites."

The king listened to the muni's words and then spoke: "I am not able to oppose that evil-souled asura. O Knower of the Law of Righteousness, I am but a wretched man and thou art worthy of my worship; thou art verily a god and also my spiritual preceptor. Since the gods, the danavas, gandharvas, yakshas, birds and snakes cannot destroy Ravana, how can man do so? In battle, Ravana is able to defeat the mightiest warriors, it is certain therefore, that neither I nor my army can contend with him. How can I then send my son, beautiful as a god, but inexperienced in war, to oppose Ravana? O Sage, I will not let my young child go. Lavana, the son of Madhu is among those who destroy the sacrifice. I will not give up my son. The sons of Sunda and Upasunda, Maricha and Suvahu, who resemble death itself in battle, are among those who impede the sacrifice. They are skilful and seasoned warriors, I dare not send my young son against them. Whoever thou chooseth, friends, relatives or even I myself will accompany thee to engage in the fight."

On hearing the king's injudicious words, the holy sage was enraged. As an oblation poured into the fire adds to the fierceness of the flame, so did the words of King Dasaratha add to the fire of anger kindled in the sage's heart.

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER 2 I

On Vasishtha's advice the king acquiesces

HEARING the words of King Dasaratha inspired by solicitude for his son, the great sage replied in displeasure :—

“ O King, recollect that thou art born in the house of Raghu, how can'st thou presume to break thy promise? This action is unworthy of thy royal line and is also improper. If this be thy determined desire, I will take my leave, do thou live at ease amidst thy relatives and friends, O Violator of thy Word ! ”

At the wrath of the august sage, the whole earth shook and the gods began to tremble. Seeing the whole world shaken with terror, the wise and patient muni Shri Vasishtha intervened, and thus addressed the king :—

“ O King, thou art born in the family of Ikshwaku and art righteousness personified ! Blessed by fortune, filled with patience and endurance, thou hast cherished great vows and should'st not, therefore, abandon dharma.¹ The three worlds know thee as virtuous, it is thy duty to maintain integrity and not to act in contradiction to it. O Chief of Men, if one making a promise does not honour it, he loses the merit of his good deeds. It is, therefore, for thee to be faithful to thy word and let Rama accompany this sage. Though Shri Ramachandra is inexperienced in warfare, yet the asuras will not be able to overcome him. Furthermore, he is under the protection of Shri Vishwamitra and no harm can come to him. How can one steal the nectar that is surrounded by fire ? The holy Vishwamitra is virtue itself, his powers are unsurpassed, and there is none living equal to him in wisdom and asceticism. In the whole world of men and other beings, none excels him in the use of weapons and none has fathomed the depth of his nature. Neither the celestials, nor the sages, nor the asuras, nor any other beings know the full glory of this sage. The god Krishasawa and his highly virtuous sons gave every variety of weapon to Vishwamitra when he was king. The two daughters

¹ Dharma—The traditional right action is dharma—personal action is duty. It has been thought best to translate it as righteousness in most cases.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

of Daksha, Jaya and Suprabha invented thousands of resplendent weapons. Shri Vishwamitra is not one, but many in one form ; he is illustrious, mighty and able to defeat any in battle. Jaya produced five hundred weapons supremely potent and capable of destroying a host of asuras. Suprabha also created five hundred weapons of war which no foe in the world could withstand. Shri Vishwamitra is an adept in the use of all these arms, O King, he is also able to create many new weapons and there is nothing in the three divisions of time¹ which is not known to him. Do not hesitate to send thy son Rama with this mighty and courageous sage, Shri Vishwamitra, and do not entertain any fears for his safety. The Sage Vishwamitra is well able to destroy the demons, but asks for the services of thy son for his own good.”

The Guru Vasishtha having thus exhorted the monarch, the king cheerfully acquiesced to Shri Ramachandra accompanying the sage.

CHAPTER 22

Ramachandra and Lakshmana set forth with Vishwamitra

INSTRUCTED by Shri Vasishtha, King Dasaratha with a cheerful countenance sent for Prince Rama and also Prince Lakshmana. At the time of their departure, the Peace Chant was recited by the king, whilst the Guru Vasishtha pronounced the benediction. The illustrious sovereign then smelt the heads² of his sons with joy and delivered them into the care of the sage.

When the lotus-eyed Ramachandra and Prince Lakshmana had taken their leave, Vayu³ sent forth cool and gentle breezes redolent with fragrance and the celestial beings showered down flowers, to the sound of the beating of drums and the blowing of conches.

¹ Past, present and future.

² The traditional embrace.

³ Vayu—The god of the wind.

BALA KANDA

Shri Vishwamitra led the way followed by the most illustrious Ramachandra, then came Shri Lakshmana of flowing locks, bearing a bow in his hand.

The two handsome and powerful princes with quivers on their backs and bows in their hands, adding lustre to the ten cardinal points, followed the muni as if two three-headed snakes¹ were following Shri Vishwamitra or as the Aswinikumaras and Kinneras follow Brahma.

Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana, armed with their bows, adorned with precious jewels and wearing gloves made of deerskin, resplendent and beautiful, girt with swords, following the holy sage, looked like the two sons of Shiva.

Coming to the river Sarayu, nine miles to the south of the capital, the Sage Vishwamitra addressed Shri Rama in gentle accents, saying : “ O Child, purify thy body with water. When thou hast done so, I will teach thee the use of Bala and Atibala. The application of these two herbs will prevent thee from being fatigued or suffering from disease, nor will age affect thee. Even should'st thou retire to rest without performing the purification ceremony no demon will be able to afflict thee ; none in the world will equal thee in prowess. O Rama, no one in the three worlds will rival thee in good fortune, skill, knowledge and practical wisdom. O Prince, when thou hast learnt these sciences, thou wilt be able to answer any question and thou wilt be unique in scholarship. These two sciences, O Rama, are the parents of all other sciences. Thou wilt be able to control hunger and thirst by their application. O Prince of the House of Raghu, by the mastery of this lore, Bala and Atibala, thou wilt attain renown throughout the whole world. These brilliant sciences are the daughters of Brahma, I shall impart them to thee, O Prince, because thou art qualified to receive them. O Rama, all the fruits of this knowledge are already thy attributes, yet when thou hast mastered it, thou wilt be able to teach it to others.”

Shri Ramachandra then poured the water over his body and with a cheerful countenance said to the Sage Vishwamitra :—
“ O Great Rishi, I am thy servant, teach me these sciences.”

¹ The bow on one shoulder, the quiver on the other with the head between gave the appearance of a three-headed snake.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Possessed of the knowledge of these two sciences, the mighty Rama resembled the sun in autumn, emitting a thousand rays. Then the two brothers massaged the feet of the holy Guru and passed the night pleasantly on the banks of the river Sarayu. Shri Rama being unaccustomed to sleeping on the ground, the two sons of King Dasaratha made a bed of grass, then having listened to the gentle words of Shri Vishwamitra, they passed the night in sleep.

CHAPTER 23

They reach the hermitage of Kama

A LITTLE before dawn, the great Muni Vishwamitra, reclining on his grassy couch, addressed the princes, saying : “ O Son of Queen Kaushalya, O Rama, the dawn is about to break, arise and perform thy morning devotions.”

The two princes, hearing the words of the most generous sage, rose, performed their ablutions, offered ceremonial water to the rising sun, worshipped their ancestors and began to repeat the holy Gayatri.¹ Their devotions completed, they offered salutations with great reverence to the distinguished ascetic and stood ready to proceed further.

In their company, the holy sage reached the confluence of the rivers where the Ganges unites herself with the Sarayu. There they beheld the holy ascetics in their sacred hermitage, where for a long time they had practised Yoga assiduously.

Seeing the peaceful hermitage, Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana were filled with delight and said to the Sage Vishwamitra : “ O Blessed Lord, whose holy hermitage is this ? Who dwells here ? We are both eager to hear of this.”

The great sage smiled and answered Rama, saying : “ Hear, my son, I will tell thee who formerly dwelt here. Kandarpa,²

¹ The Gayatri—Said to be the mother of all prayers, the most sacred text of the Veda.

² Kandarpa—The god of love.

BALA KANDA

whom the pundits called Kama once took human form and fixed in meditation, worshipped the Lord Shiva here. When Shri Shiva was passing with his newly-wedded bride, accompanied by celestial beings, Kama tried to agitate the mind of the Lord Shiva and reaped the due punishment of his insolence. O Son of the House of Raghu, Shiva in wrath opened his third eye and the members of Kama's body were consumed. Since Kama was reduced to ashes by the God, he has been a disembodied being. O Rama, since that time, he has been known as Ananga (bodiless) and the country where his limbs were strewn as he sought to flee, is known as Anga. This hermitage belongs to the Lord Shiva and the holy men who dwell here are his traditional devotees : they are both righteous and sinless. O Rama, Thou of pleasing looks, this night I shall break my journey at this hermitage and to-morrow we shall cross the sacred river and proceed further. O Rama, let us first purify ourselves by bathing and then recite the holy Gayatri silently, offering oblations into the sacred fire, we will thereafter pass the night in the hermitage."

While Shri Rama and the sage were conversing, the holy ascetics dwelling in the hermitage, knew by the power of their Yoga, that these great beings were approaching and were highly gratified.

Having presented arghya to Shri Vishwamitra, they then offered hospitality to Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana. Entertained by those dwelling in the hermitage who regaled them with the holy traditions and philosophical discourses, they remained there for their evening devotion and with great delight abode in the hermitage of Kama, the devout sages gathering round Shri Vishwamitra who engaged them in pleasing converse.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

CHAPTER 24

*The two princes with Vishwamitra behold the dark forest
of Taraka*

WHEN the day dawned, the two princes performed their daily devotions and followed Shri Vishwamitra to the river.

The keepers of sacred vows, the dwellers in the holy hermitage accompanied them to the river bank and arranged for an excellent boat to take them across; they said to Shri Vishwamitra :—

“ O Great Rishi, do not delay, please board the vessel with the royal princes, now, and thus avoid the heat of the day.”

Shri Vishwamitra paid reverence to the devout sages and proceeded to cross the sacred river. When the craft was in mid-stream, the roar of the waters was heard by Shri Ramachandra and his younger brother. They questioned the holy sage, saying : “ O Venerable Lord, what is the cause of this tumult ? ”

In answer to Shri Ramachandra, Shri Vishwamitra described the cause of the sound in the following manner :—

“ O Prince, on Mount Kailasha,¹ Shri Brahma created a lake by the power of his thought, on account of which it is called the Lake of the Mind (Manasarovara). The holy river Sarayu rises in the Manasa Lake and flows through the capital Ayodhya, here it joins the sacred stream Gunga, and this sound is produced when the two rivers unite. With concentrated mind, offer salutations to them.”

The two royal princes made obeisance to the rivers, and having reached the southern bank, left the boat and proceeded onward. Walking further, the two princes beheld a dark and terrible forest and Shri Ramachandra again addressed the Sage as follows : “ O Great Sage, this forest looks dark and sinister; above the ceaseless clamour of crickets and other insects, fearful beasts can be heard roaring. The forest resounds with their dread cries while the harsh and discordant notes of birds echo

¹ Mt. Kailasha—The abode of Lord Shiva.

BALA KANDA

through it. See, O Sage ! Boars, lions, tigers and elephants abound there, it is overgrown with dhara, ashwakarna, kujaja, patala, sillea and tinduka trees,¹ it is indeed terrifying.”

The highly resplendent Sage Vishwamitra hearing these words, said : “ My son, I will tell thee something of this dark forest. Formerly there were two cities named Malava and Karusha, they were both prosperous and resembled the cities built by the gods. O Rama, in ancient times, Indra slew the wicked Vritrasura then, being hungry and thirsty, he went to an inauspicious and isolated place where he became distressed on account of the sin of having slain a brahmin. The gods and holy sages bathed Indra in the sacred waters of the Ganges, and purged away his sin by pouring jars of water charged with mantrams over him. In this way, the remorse of Indra was appeased, the pollution caused by slaying a brahmin was washed away and he was highly gratified. Purified and sinless, Indra gladly conferred a boon on this land saying : ‘ These two cities will be known as Malava and Karusha and they will acquire great renown, their prosperity will be famed throughout the earth.’ ”

“ When Indra thus favoured these two cities, the celestial beings praised him and cried : ‘ Be it so.’ These two places soon enjoyed great prosperity and fame. In the course of time, a perverse yakshini² was born here, possessing the strength of a thousand elephants. Her name was Taraka, the wife of Sunda, and her son was the rakshasa, Maricha, who was equal in strength to Indra himself. He possessed long arms, an enormous mouth, and a gigantic body. This terrible rakshasa continually destroys the people of these two lands.

“ O Rama, the wicked Taraka constantly plunders and devastates these two countries. Obstructing the road, she lives at two miles distance from here ; let us enter the forest of Taraka. By my command, O Rama, do thou slay the wicked yakshini and set the country free. O Rama, none dares to come hither for fear of Taraka ; save this land from the dangerous demoness. This is why this forest is uninhabited, but thou can’st restore it. This wicked yakshini is unceasingly bent on her evil designs.”

¹ See separate glossary of Flowers and Trees.

² Yakshini—a female yaksha, a class of supernatural beings attendant on the god of wealth, Kuvera.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

CHAPTER 25

*Vishwamitra seeks to convince Rama that it is his duty
to slay Taraka*

HEARING the words of Shri Vishwamitra, Shri Rama of limitless power and influence uttered the following auspicious words :—

“ O Great Sage, it is said that the yakshinis have little power, then how is it that Taraka has come to possess the strength of a thousand elephants ? ”

The mahatma listened to Rama's words and said : “ O Prince, I will relate the story to thee. This female demon has acquired her great strength by virtue of a boon which she received. In the past, a powerful yaksha by the name of Suketu, who was virtuous but childless, performed many yogic practices which pleased Shri Brahma, who promised him a daughter by name Taraka, and conferred on her the strength of a thousand elephants. But the most illustrious Brahma did not grant a son to that yaksha. When the daughter grew up and possessed both the charm of youth and great beauty, her father gave her in marriage to Sunda, the son of Jambha. After some time, the yakshini gave birth to a son. His name was Maricha and he was very powerful ; though born of yaksha parentage he became a rakshasa through a curse. O Rama, when the Sage Agastya condemned Sunda to death by cursing him, then Taraka and her son wished to devour the sage. Seeing her running towards him, the blessed Sage Agastya cursed Maricha and said ‘ Become a demon ’. He also cursed that wicked woman so that she became a cannibal with a hideous countenance. Shri Agastya said : ‘ May thy beauty vanish and mayest thou become a terrible rakshasi.’ Then Taraka, transported with anger under this curse, began to destroy this sacred land because it was here that the Sage Agastya performed his yogic practices.

“ O Rama, thou must slay this wicked and impious demon Taraka, who ravages the land. For the good of the brahmins and the king, O Raghava, accomplish this ; do not hesitate to destroy this vile yakshini. It is the duty of a warrior to protect those of the four castes. A prince must not eschew

BALA KANDA

deeds that are painful and difficult, for the preservation of his people. It is according to the law of eternal dharma, O Rama, that even deeds that appear ruthless, are permitted to those appointed to protect their subjects. O Raghava, Taraka is wholly evil, and therefore must be destroyed. It is said that in the past Manthara, a daughter of King Virochana, was slain by Indra because she was the cause of the destruction of others. The blessed Lord Vishnu Himself slew the wife of the Sage Bhrigu, devoted to her husband, and the mother of Shukra because she was intent on killing Indra. Many other great-souled princes of old also condemned wicked women to death. Therefore, it is for thee to fulfil thy duty and slay this yakshini without delay."

CHAPTER 26

How the yakshini Taraka was slain

THE son of Dasaratha, firm in his vows, listened to the inspiring words of the Sage Vishwamitra, which filled him with ardour, and with joined palms he humbly addressed him :—

"To fulfil the commands of my royal sire and to honour his promise, I deem it my duty to act according to thy instructions without hesitation. My father, the emperor, at the time of my departure from Ayodhya bade me carry out thy injunctions—O Muni, I shall honour them. I am prepared to execute thy commands, O Rishi, because it will lead to the benefit of the brahmins and the king, and will also bring happiness to the people of this land."

Having spoken thus, Shri Rama grasped his bow and, twanging the string, filled all the cardinal points with the sound. The denizens of the forest were terrified, and Taraka was overcome with helpless rage. Full of wrath that yakshini ran in the direction from which the sound came and Shri Ramachandra beholding that gigantic and misshapen monster was incensed and said to Lakshmana: "O Brother, behold this

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

fearful yakshini of formidable size, whose very aspect would strike terror into timorous hearts. See, O Lakshmana, how I shall cut off her ears and nose and put her to flight ! She is horrible, versed in black magic and hard to subdue, but it is not proper to deprive a woman of her life. A woman is worthy of protection, therefore, I shall incapacitate her, by depriving her of the power of motion thus preventing her from doing further mischief."

While Shri Rama was still speaking, the dreadful Taraka ran towards him roaring with uplifted arms. The Rishi Vishwamitra approaching her encouraged Rama, with a shout, crying, "Jai to the descendant of Raghu". Notwithstanding, Taraka raised a thick cloud of dust and for a while Shri Rama and Lakshmana could see nothing. Then the yakshini by the power of magic caused a shower of rocks to rain on the two brothers and Rama was now filled with wrath. Parrying the rain of rocks and advancing towards her, he cut off both her hands. Then Shri Lakshmana severed the nose and ears of the asuri who had already been deprived of her hands. Assuming various forms, she tried to deceive the princes by vanishing away. Then from her hiding place, she showered heavy rocks on them, and a rain of stones fell on every side.

Shri Vishwamitra, who stood watching the combat, now cried : "Enough, she does not deserve further mercy ; should'st thou spare her, she will gain strength through her magic powers and will again break up our holy rites. The evening is approaching and in the evening rakshasas are overcome with difficulty ; slay her, therefore, without delay."

Then Shri Vishwamitra pointed out the concealed yakshini to Rama, who drew from his quiver arrows capable of following sound and surrounded her with them. The powerful female demon, an adept in occult powers, encompassed by the rain of arrows, advanced roaring, towards the princes. With an arrow, Shri Rama pierced the heart of the wicked yakshini, who fell to the ground and expired. Seeing the terrible yakshini slain, Indra and other celestial beings worshipped Shri Rama, crying : "Well done, well done, O Holy Rama ! " All the gods filled with joy, said to Shri Vishwamitra : "O Muni, may prosperity attend thee, Indra and the gods are gratified with

BALA KANDA

Shri Ramachandra's feat of arms, show thy special favour to him *and deliver to him the two kinds of weapons, natural and supernatural, belonging to Krishhashwa*. Present Shri Ramachandra, who is worthy to receive them, with all the other mighty weapons, he is wholly devoted to thee ; these two princes are destined to achieve great things."

Having uttered these words, the gods bowed down to the Sage Vishwamitra and returned to their abode.

Evening fell, and the holy sage gladdened by the slaying of the wicked Taraka by Shri Rama, smelt the head of the prince and addressed him thus : " O Rama, this night we will remain here and to-morrow morning proceed to my hermitage."

Shri Rama rejoiced to hear the muni's words and rested happily during the night in the forest.

On the day that Taraka was slain, the forest, freed from the curse, adorned with champaka,¹ ashoka,¹ mango and other trees, looked as charming as the forest of Chitraratha.²

Shri Ramachandra, whom the siddhas praised for slaying Taraka, passed the night in the forest, awaiting the dawn.

CHAPTER 27

Shri Rama is given the celestial weapons

HAVING passed the night resting in the forest, the illustrious Sage Vishwamitra spoke to Rama smilingly, in sweet accents :—

" O Prince of Great Renown, I am entirely satisfied with thee and am happy to give thee these weapons by means of which thou shalt be able to conquer and subdue all thine enemies, whether devas, asuras or nagas.³ Accept these divine weapons,⁴ O Rama. Here is the great celestial disc and the Dunda weapon,

¹ Champaka—a type of magnolia.

Ashoka—a tree resembling the coconut.

² Chitraratha—The king of the gandharvas, q.v. page 3.

³ Nagas—The serpent race.

⁴ Weapons—for full list see separate glossary.

} For full list of trees
see separate glossary.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

the Disc of Dharma, the Kala weapon, the Disc of Vishnu and the irresistible Weapon of Indra. O Great Prince, here is the Mace and the Spear of Mahendra the Brahma-Shira and the Ishika. O Mighty-armed One, take the Shankara weapon and the two great maces Koumoduki and Lohitamukhi. O Great Prince receive also the mighty Dharma-pasha, the Kala-pasha and the Varuna-pasha and two other maces called Shoshka and Ashani; the Pinaka weapon, the Narayana weapon and the fire-emitting weapon Agneya.

“O Rama, take this wind weapon, Vayuvya, and the horse-headed weapon, Hayashira, also the Krauncha weapon. I give thee further two powers and the weapons called Kankala, Mushala, Rapala and Kinkini. O Mighty Prince, I confer on thee the two supernatural weapons named Vidyadhara and Nandana, useful in fighting the Asuras.

“Take this jewel among swords, which I give to thee, O Mighty-armed One, and another supernatural weapon named Gandharva, and here, O Rama, is one very dear to me called Manava. Here are Prashaman, Soura, Praswaprana, Darpana and that which has the power of drying up, and the pain-inflicting weapon causing lamentation. I grant thee also the strength to bear the Madana-astra presented to me by Kandarpa which creates in man unbearable sexual desire so that he is unable to fight. Here also is the Paisha-astra and the Mohan-astra.

“O ! Illustrious Prince, receive also the weapon that produces inertia, and the great Saumana weapon. O Great Prince, here are the Samvartta, Moushalya, Sattyastra and Mayadhara, and take the Tajaprabha by means of which the strength and courage of the foe are withdrawn, and also the Shishira which chills and the Somastra and Twashtra.

“O Rama, now thou art all-powerful and knowest the secrets of magic, yet take the Bava, Shitesu and Manava astra also. O Prince, receive the Paramodara-astra, take all these weapons from me.”

Then the great Vishwamitra turned his face to the east and performed the purificatory rites with joy, conferring on Rama the mantrams¹ for employing the weapons and instructing him

¹ Mantrams—sacred formulas.

BALA KANDA

in the methods unknown even to the gods. All these weapons did Shri Vishwamitra confer on Rama, and he, repeating the appropriate mantrams, caused their presiding deities to appear before him. Approaching with joined palms, they said : “ O Prince of the House of Raghu, we are thy servants and will obey thy behests.”

Shri Rama, having surveyed and blessed them, answered : “ Come and serve me when I summon you.”

Thereafter, Shri Ramachandra offering salutations to the venerable Sage Vishwamitra, said : “ Let us proceed further, my Lord.”

CHAPTER 28

He is instructed in their use

HAVING received the weapons and instructions for their use, Shri Rama addressed the sage in charming accents as they proceeded onward.

He said : “ O Blessed One, by thy grace, I have received weapons which even the devas and asuras cannot easily obtain. Be pleased to tell me further, how I may withdraw these weapons when they are discharged ? ”

Then the supremely patient and holy sage taught Shri Ramachandra the method of withdrawing the mantra-propelled weapons and gave him more by the name of Satya-vana, Satya-kirti, Dhrishta, Raphasa, Pratiharatara, Parangmukha, Avangmukha, Lakshya, Alakshya, Drir nabha and Sunabhuka, Dasharsha, Shutavaktra, Dasha-shirsha, Shatodara, Dharma-nabha and Maha-nabha, Dunda-nabha and Swanabhuka, Jyotisha and Shakuna and the two weapons Nirashya and Vimala, also the Yogandhara and Vinidra, Ditya and Pramanthana, Shuchivahu, Mahavanu, Nishkali, Virucha, Sarchi-mali Dhriti and Mali, Vrittiman and Ruchira, Pitryia and Soamanasvidhuta and Makara, Karavira with Rati, Dhana and Dhanya.

The holy sage said, “ O Rama, receive also Kamarupa, Kamaruchi, Moha and Avarana, also Jrim Bhala, Sarpa-natha

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

with Sandhana and Varuna. Receive from me, O Rama, the Krishashwa which assumes any form—O Prince, mayest thou be triumphant, thou art worthy to possess these weapons". Shri Rama answered " May it be so, my Lord".

The holy rishi¹ then placed the divine weapons before Rama, some of which shone like fire, others with the colour of smoke and yet others which resembled the sun and moon. With joined palms the deities presiding over them addressed Shri Rama with submission, saying: " O Prince, we are at thy service, what would'st thou have us accomplish?" Shri Rama answered: " When called to mind in the time of need, grant me aid, now depart, all of you."

Offering obeisance to Shri Ramachandra, they replied: " Be it so, my Lord," and returned to their abode.

Shri Rama then questioned the great rishi, saying: " O Spiritual Sovereign, what is this that resembles a dark cloud near the mountain? It would seem to be a grove of trees, pleasing to the sight, filled with deer. I hear birds singing sweetly, have we then passed the dangerous forest which was a cause of fear? O Lord, let us rest here at peace; tell me, whose hermitage is this? O Great Muni, are we now in thine own hermitage, where the wicked demons, the slayers of brahmins obstruct thy sacrifice? O Blessed One, be pleased to show me the place of thy sacrifice. O Wise One, I will slay the meddlesome demons who hinder thy devotions. Be gracious enough to enlighten me in the matter, O Sage."

CHAPTER 29

*Vishwamitra relates the story of his hermitage
and commences the sacrifice*

To the most glorious Shri Ramachandra making enquiry concerning the forest, the illustrious Sage Vishwamitra made answer :—

¹ Rishi—an illumined sage, who has had a vision of Truth or Reality.

BALA KANDA

“ O Rama, this is the place at which the Blessed Lord Vishnu, the first among the gods, dwelt, observing his yogic practices for immeasurable years and previous to that, it belonged to the glorious Vamana.¹ This spot is called Siddha-ashrama, for here, these great souls practised austerities with success. At that time, Bali the son of King Virochana, conquered Indra and other devas, together with the deities of the wind and he ruled over the three worlds. When Bali initiated a sacrifice, the devas, under the leadership of Agni² approached Shri Vishnu in this hermitage and said: ‘ O Lord, the son of Virochana, King Bali is observing a great sacrifice; while it is yet incomplete, come to our aid. The Lord grants the requests of those who seek His favour, therefore, by the power of Thy Yoga and for our own good, take the form of a dwarf (Vamana) and secure our welfare.’ Meantime, O Rama, the Sage Kashyapa, resplendent as fire, who was endowed with supreme lustre by virtue of his yogic practices, with his spouse Aditi, having completed a thousand years’ austerities, began to praise Madhusudana, the conferrer of boons, saying: ‘ O Supreme Purusha,³ Thou art adored through austerity and Thou dost grant the fruit of austerity, Thy nature is knowledge and asceticism, it is by virtue of austerity that I behold Thee. O Lord, in Thy body I see the whole world animate and inanimate. In Thee Who art beginningless and indescribable, I take refuge.’

“ The blessed Vishnu was pleased with this prayer and said to the sinless Sage: ‘ O Kashyapa, mayest thou see perfection, thou hast merited a boon, ask what thou desirest.’

“ Then Kashyapa, the son of Marichi, answered: ‘ O Blessed Lord, Aditi, the gods and I beseech Thee to grant this boon—Become the son of my sinless wife and myself. O Lord, become the younger brother of Indra and assist the sorrow-stricken devas. This spot, by Thy grace, shall then be known as Siddha-Ashrama.’ (Hermitage of the Perfect Ones.)

“ Upon this, the resplendent Vishnu was born of the womb of Aditi as the incarnation Vamana and disguised as a mendicant, he approached King Bali. Of him, he requested a piece of

¹ Vamana—An incarnation of Shri Vishnu as the holy Dwarf.

² Agni—The god of fire.

³ Purusha—The Supreme Being, the Soul of the Universe. Literally the Lord of the body, called the city of the nine gates.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

ground that could be covered by three strides, and having obtained what he asked, he covered the whole universe in three steps.

“This restful hermitage formerly belonging to Vamana, whose devotee I am, is enjoyed by me. Here the rakshasas wreak destruction. O Lion among men, remain here and slay them. O Rama, to-day let us enter the Siddha-Ashrama together. O Friend, this hermitage is not only mine but thine also.”

Accompanied by Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana, the holy sage entered the hermitage, which appeared as beautiful as the autumn moon attended by the planet Punarvasu.¹ When the sages dwelling in the Siddha-Ashrama perceived Shri Vishwamitra, they rose and saluted him with joy. Having duly honoured the resplendent sage, they entertained the princes in a fitting manner.

Having rested awhile, the two princes humbly and respectfully addressed the holy sage, saying: “O Great Sage, inaugurate thy sacrifice to-day, may it be attended with good fortune. This place is the Siddha-Ashrama, we wish thee success in thy undertaking.”

Thereupon the great sage with due preparation, his mind subdued, began the sacrifice while the two princes kept vigil. Having passed the night in this manner, in accordance with the prescribed rules, they performed their ablutions, repeating the mantram silently, they then paid respect to Shri Vishwamitra and occupied their seats as do those performing a fire-sacrifice.

CHAPTER 30

*Maricha and Suwahu obstruct the sacrifice and are slain
by Rama*

THE two princes, knowing what was appropriate in respect to time and place and skilled in the art of conquering their foes, uttered words fitting to the place and occasion.

¹ Punarvasu—The seventh of the lunar asterisms, called Nakshatras or wives of the moon. Punarvasu is the most beloved.

BALA KANDA

They said : " O Blessed One, we desire to hear at what moment in the course of the sacrifice, the two demons appear ? It is essential for us to be acquainted with the matter, to forestall their attack."

The dwellers in the Siddha-ashrama, hearing the words of the princes, and finding them eager to fight the demons, praised them saying : " O Princes, from now on, keep watch over the sacrifice for six days ; the Sage Vishwamitra having begun the rite will observe a strict silence during that time."

On this, the two illustrious princes kept watch in the Tapovana forest continuously for six days without sleeping. Armed with bow and arrows they guarded the rishi and his sacrifice with firm resolve. Five days passed without interruption and on the sixth day Shri Ramachandra said to Lakshmana : " Brother, be prepared to-day."

As Shri Rama uttered these words concerning the approaching conflict with the demons, the altar fire blazed up suddenly. The officiating brahmin, the priest and Shri Vishwamitra, who were watching, beheld all the sacrificial implements set on fire.

The sacrifice of the holy sage still proceeding, a great and fearful clamour resounded in the firmament. As in the rainy season, clouds cover the sky, so the demons by the power of magic began to course through the air.

Maricha and Suvahu and other demons surrounding the altar, let fall torrents of blood. Seeing the altar deluged with blood, Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana were filled with anger and ran to discover the cause. Then they saw Maricha and other demons in the sky. Raghava beholding the demons rushing towards him, said to Lakshmana, " O Lakshmana, see these evil flesh-eating demons, I shall destroy them with the Manava-weapon, as the wind scatters the clouds ".

So saying, Shri Ramachandra hurled the shining Manava weapon at them and striking the breast of Maricha, inflicted a wound. Thus smitten, the demon was flung into the sea, a distance of a hundred miles. Perceiving Maricha reeling, struck senseless by the Manava weapon, Shri Ramachandra addressed Lakshmana, saying : " Behold the power of this great weapon created by the muni ! Yet, though Maricha has been deprived of his senses, he is not dead ; verily I shall now destroy

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

those wicked, merciless and sinful blood-drinking demons who obstruct the holy sacrifice." So saying, he seized the fire-weapon and discharged it at the breast of Suvahu, who straightway fell to the ground and expired. On this, Shri Rama destroyed the remaining demons with the air-weapon (Vayuvya).

Thus by slaying the obstructors of the sacrifice did Shri Ramachandra bring delight to the hearts of the sages and was worshipped by them as was formerly the victorious Indra.

When the sacrifice had been successfully completed, perceiving the world to be freed from the interference of the asuras, the Rishi Vishwamitra said to Rama :—

" O Mighty-armed Prince, to-day I have fulfilled my spiritual purpose, thou hast obeyed the commands of thy Guru perfectly, truly thou hast made the Siddha-Ashrama worthy of its name."

CHAPTER 31

*Vishwamitra starts out with the two princes to attend
King Janaka's sacrifice*

THE great hero, the ever-cheerful Rama, together with Lakshmana having successfully assisted Shri Vishwamitra, passed the night in the hermitage.

At dawn, after purifying themselves, they approached Shri Vishwamitra and offered obeisance to him and the other sages. Bowing down before the great muni, who was as resplendent as a blazing fire, they addressed him in submissive tones, saying : " O Great Rishi, we are both thy humble servants, what further commands are there for us ? We are here to obey."

The other rishis, led by Shri Vishwamitra, listened to the words of Shri Ramachandra and answered saying : " O Great One, the King of Mithila, the righteous Janaka is performing a holy sacrifice and we shall attend it. O Great Beings, be pleased to accompany us ; there you will see a rare and wonderful bow. In ancient days this bow was given by the devas to

BALA KANDA

Janaka, it is exceedingly heavy and splendid. Neither gandharvas nor asuras can bend this great bow, how much less man? To test their skill, great kings have come to the assembly of King Janaka, but none has succeeded in raising the bow and stringing it. O Illustrious One, let us go and see the sacrifice of the King of Mithila and also that marvellous bow. In former days, King Janaka performed a sacrifice and the fruit of it was the great bow which he obtained from the gods who instructed him saying : ' Place this bow in the sacrificial chamber and let it be worshipped with incense, perfume and lights '."

Shri Vishwamitra having related these facts, started out accompanied by the two princes and other sages. Invoking the Vanadevata (Forest Deity) he said to him : " My sacrifice has come to a successful conclusion, may happiness be thine. I am leaving the Siddha-Ashrama for the banks of the sacred river Gunga on the slopes of the Himalayas, situated in the domain of King Janaka."

Then the sage reverently circumambulated the hermitage and turned northwards. As Shri Vishwamitra entered upon his journey, the sages skilled in the knowledge of the science of Brahman, accompanied him with their chattels placed on hundreds of waggons. The birds and beasts of the hermitage also followed them for a long way until the holy muni requested them to turn back.

The sages and the holy muni reached the banks of the river Shona at sunset and, having bathed and recited their evening prayers, performed the fire sacrifice.

Shri Ramachandra and Prince Lakshmana then offered salutations to Shri Vishwamitra and the other rishis, and sat down before them. Thereafter Shri Rama cheerfully enquired : " O Lord, what country is this, covered with verdant groves? Be gracious enough to relate everything concerning it."

The great ascetic of firm vows, was pleased to hear these words and, sitting amidst the sages, he described the country fully to them.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

CHAPTER 32

Vishwamitra tells of his ancestors and the dynasty of King Kusha

“ O RAMA, in times of yore, there was a king named Kusha, he was the son of a brahmin, a noted ascetic, faithful to his vows, conversant with dharma and ever revered by the virtuous. He wedded a high-born woman of great beauty named Bhidharvi, and begat four sons, each resembling himself. Their names were Kushamba, Kushanabha, Umurita-rajasa and Basu ; these four princes were mighty and active, and desirous of teaching them the duties of a kshatriya, the truthful and righteous King Kusha addressed them as follows :—

“ ‘ O My Sons, protect and nourish your subjects, this practice is productive of great merit.’

“ In order to carry out the instructions of their sire, these princes founded four cities and named them after themselves. The mighty Kushamba called his city Kaushambi, and the righteous Kushanabha founded the city of Mahodaya. O Rama, Prince Umurita-rajasa founded the city named Dhar-maranya and the Prince Basu called his city Giribrat, also named Basumati. This city was surrounded by five mountain peaks and the river Magadhi or Shona meandering through the mountains resembled a lovely garland. O Rama, this stream the Magadhi flows towards the east and irrigates the fruitful fields on either bank.

“ O Prince of Raghu, Kushanabha took in wedlock a nymph named Ghritachi and by her had one hundred beautiful daughters, who on reaching maturity were delightful to look upon. One day, clad in lovely dresses, in beauty of form unparalleled they wandered in the garden like lightning amidst the clouds. Singing, dancing and playing on instruments they seemed to be divine forms which had materialised and descended on the earth, or like the stars in the firmament.

“ Seeing those lovely and virtuous princesses, Vayu the wind

BALA KANDA

god thus addressed them : ' I entreat you all to be wedded to me ; give up your mortal form, I will render you immortal. Remember youth is passing and youth among mortals passes even more swiftly ; wedded to me, you will be beautiful for ever.'

" The damsels listened to the improper speech of the wind god and replied mockingly : ' O Deity of the Wind, thou knowest all that is passing in the hearts of men, but we know what is passing in thy heart. Why dost thou insult us, O Wind ? O Vayu, who art renowned for thy wisdom, we virgins by the power of our devotion and self-control can effect thy downfall, but because the merits of the righteous come to nought when they cause harm to others, we shall preserve our sacred vows inviolate. O Stupid One, heaven forbid that we choose husbands for ourselves without first seeking the approval of our honoured sire. He is as a god to us and our master, and we shall wed the husbands he chooses for us.'

" The wind god was enraged and entering their bodies, twisted and distorted them. Thus afflicted, the princesses in tears, approached their father for assistance.

" The king was grieved to see his daughters in this condition and said : ' O speak, what has occurred ? Who, disregarding justice, has deformed you ? Tell me all.' The monarch was deeply moved by this event and his heart became heavy."

CHAPTER 33

King Kushanabha's hundred daughters

WHEN the hundred princesses were thus questioned by the king their father, they placed their heads at his feet and answered : " The wind god, who pervades all, has entered the evil path and desired us to forsake virtuous conduct. We told him we were not free to choose our way of life since our father was still living and that he should consult thee if he wished to wed us, but that sinful god, disregarding our request has twisted and deformed our bodies in this manner."

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

The great king hearing the complaint of the hundred virgins, said to them : “ You have acted nobly by practising forbearance towards the deity. It is meet that the generous-minded should exercise forbearance, you have added to the honour of our dynasty. Forbearance is the chief ornament of both man and woman, you have achieved something rare ; few are capable of such forbearance. O Virgins, forbearance is charity, forbearance is truth, forbearance is sacrifice. A man’s true glory is forbearance ; forbearance is dharma. The world is established in forbearance.”

Having spoken thus, the princesses were comforted, and the king dismissed them. Then the monarch, mighty like a god, summoned his ministers and consulted them regarding the alliance of his daughters to suitable families at the proper time and place.

Now a great muni named Chuli full of glory derived from prolonged celibacy and highly virtuous, was engaged in sacred austerities for the purpose of spiritual liberation.

At that place, the virgin daughter of the nymph Urmila, named Somada, began to minister to the muni. She attended on the great sage for a long time with undeviating faith and devotion and her Guru was pleased with her ; he said to her : “ I am pleased with thee, what desire of thine shall I fulfil ? ”

Perceiving the muni to be highly pleased, that sweet-voiced nymph acquainted with the art of conversation made answer to him : “ O King of Kings, I desire to bear a son, resplendent with divine power, a worshipper of God and devoted to dharma. I have no husband, nor do I wish to be the wife of any, as I am a brahmacharini,¹ therefore, by virtue of thy Yoga, grant me a son produced by the power of thy thought.”

The divine Sage Chuli was pleased to hear these words and granted her a son named Brahmadatta, by the power of his mind. Brahmadatta became King of Kampila and was as prosperous as Indra in heaven. King Kushanabha resolved to give his daughters in marriage to King Brahmadatta. Kushanabha requested King Brahmadatta to visit him and joyfully gave him his daughters in marriage.

¹ Brahmachari or brahmacharini—male or female celibate religious student who lives with the teacher and is devoted to the practice of spiritual discipline.

BALA KANDA

O Ramaji, King Brahmadatta, who was equal to Indra in glory wedded the princesses one by one by taking their hands in his. Through the touch of his hand, the princesses were freed from their deformity and restored to their former beauty. When King Kushnabha beheld his daughters released from their disfigurement and restored to their former beauty he was filled with joy.

Thus did the King Kushnabha give his daughters in marriage to King Brahmadatta and then commanded their preceptors to accompany them to the court of his son-in-law.

Somada was delighted with the union of her son to the damsels and receiving them with great affection, commended the virtuous King Kushanabha.

CHAPTER 34

His son, Gadhi, is the father of Vishwamitra

“O RAMAJI, after the wedding of his daughters, the sinless King Kushanabha prepared to perform a sacrifice in order to obtain a son.

“At the inauguration of the sacrifice, the munificent King Kusha, son of Shri Brahma, said to Kushanabha: ‘O my Son, thou wilt obtain a son like thyself, he should be named Gadhi, he will bring thee immortal renown.’

“After some time a son was born to the wise King Kushanabha who was a lover of virtue, and his name was Gadhi. This Gadhi, O Rama, was my virtuous father¹ and because I was born in the family of Kusha I was called Kaushika.

“I had, O Prince, an elder sister named Satyavati, who became the faithful spouse of Richika. When her lord died, she ascended to heaven and took the form of the Kaushiki river. The river is sacred and beautiful, and its waters confer merit on men. To bless the world Satyavati became the river flowing near the Himalayas.

¹ The Rishi Vishwamitra is still speaking here.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

“ O Prince, through love of my sister, I dwell on the banks of the Kaushiki river near the Himalayas.

“ Established in truth, faithful to her lord, that sister of mine, named Satyavati is to-day the river Kaushiki, great among streams and highly fortunate.

“ O Rama, in order to perform a sacrifice, I went to the Siddha ashrama, I have now accomplished my purpose.

“ O Rama, at thy instance, I have told thee of my family and origin ; the night is far spent in listening to this tale, now rest, so that, refreshed, we may resume our journey to-morrow. Peace be with thee !

“ The leaves of the trees are motionless, the birds and beasts are silent and darkness covers all. How imperceptibly the evening has passed away. The sky is brilliant with stars, as if a thousand eyes gazed down on us.

“ The bright moon with its cool beams, slowly rising higher and higher dispels the darkness. Nocturnal wanderers and the terrible flesh-eating yakshas prowl about here and there.”

Having uttered these words, the great Sage Vishwamitra became silent. The other munis praised him saying : “ Well spoken, well spoken, O Sage.”

They said : “ The dynasty of Kusha has ever practised righteousness and the kings of this line have been eminent in virtue. Of this dynasty, thou, O Vishwamitra, art the most illustrious, the fame of this royal line has been enhanced by the beautiful river Kaushiki.”

Thus did the great sages praise the Rishi Vishwamitra, who then withdrew to rest, as the sun sets behind a mountain.

Shri Ramachandra and his brother Lakshmana, full of wonder also made obeisance to the holy sage and retired to sleep.

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER 35

Vishwamitra begins to narrate the origin of the holy river Gunga

HAVING passed the night with the other munis on the banks of the river Shona, Shri Vishwamitra said to Prince Rama at daybreak : "Arise, O Prince, the day has dawned, may prosperity attend thee ! Perform thy morning devotions and let us prepare for our journey."

Shri Rama listened to the instructions of the holy sage, recited his morning prayers and prepared to leave, saying : " O Knower of God, the waters of the holy river Shona appear to be very shallow and rest on a sandy bed, be pleased to instruct us where we should cross over it."

The sage replied : " O Prince, I will show thee where the great rishis traversed it." Thereafter they forded the river and journeyed on and on, enjoying the many beautiful woods and forests through which they passed.

After proceeding a great distance, late one afternoon, they reached the holy river Ganges, beloved of the sages. On beholding the lovely river rendered beautiful by the presence of swans and cranes, Rama, Lakshmana and the sages were filled with delight.

They halted on the banks and bathed in the sacred river as prescribed by the holy ordinance, then lighting their sacrificial fires they partook of the remains of the offerings. According to the tradition, they offered water to their ancestors and spreading coverings, seated themselves by the holy Ganges.

Sitting in the midst of the sages with the two princes before him, Shri Vishwamitra was questioned by Shri Rama in the following manner :—

" O Lord, I desire to hear the story of this holy river, which traverses the three paths.¹ How does the sacred Gunga, passing through the three worlds merge at last in the ocean ? "

¹ In Hindu mythology the universe is divided into the three worlds : Bhur, Bhuvah, Swah, the lower, middle and upper worlds. The sacred river is said to traverse all three.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

On this request, Shri Vishwamitra began to narrate the origin and genesis of the sacred river.

“O Rama, the great Himavat, Lord of the Himalayas, the treasury of all precious metals, had two daughters, who were unsurpassed in loveliness on earth. Their mother Mena, the wife of Himachala (Himavat) was the daughter of Mount Meru. Her elder daughter was named Gunga and the younger Uma.

“The devas wishing to observe certain sacred rites, asked for Shri Gunga to promote the success of their undertaking and with the permission of her father, took her away with them.

“Himachala, mindful of the good of all beings, gave his daughter Gunga, the purifier of the whole world, to the gods, thinking it to be his duty to do so. The gods supremely gratified took his daughter Gunga and blessing all, left Himachala.

“O Prince of the House of Raghu, the other daughter of Himachala, named Uma, practised great asceticism, considering it to be her chief wealth. Himachala gave this ascetic daughter Uma, who was venerated by the whole world, to Shri Mahadeva¹ in marriage, thinking him to be a worthy consort.

“O Rama, now I have told thee of the two daughters of Himachala, revered by the whole world, the river Gunga and Uma Devi.

“O my Son, O Chief of Disciples, I have related to thee the story of Shri Gunga accompanying the devas to heaven. This beautiful daughter of the King of Himalaya, once resident in heaven, is the charming river Gunga, whose waters destroy all sin.”

CHAPTER 36

The story of the king of Himalayas' younger daughter Uma

HEARING the wonderful narrative, so eloquently related by Shri Vishwamitra, both the princes praised the holy sage and said :
“O Divine Sage, thou hast told us a tale, by the hearing of

¹ Mahadeva—A title of the Lord Shiva.

BALA KANDA

which great merit is acquired, be gracious enough to enlighten us further regarding the elder daughter of the King of Himalaya. Thou art omniscient, therefore describe to us fully, how the Gunga, the world purifying stream, came down from heaven to earth. O Thou, versed in the science of dharma, why is this sacred river called Tripathaga (the Traverser of the Three Worlds) and whence is this name derived ? ”

Seated amidst the other sages, Shri Vishwamitra, whose only wealth was truth and austerity, spoke as follows, in answer to Shri Rama's questioning :—

“ O Prince, in ancient times, the holy Lord Mahadeva was wedded to Parvati¹ and being charmed with her beauty devoted himself to the delights of connubial bliss. According to the measure of time of the gods, the Lord Mahadeva passed a hundred years with that devi² but remained without issue. In their anxiety, the gods approached Shri Brahma and said :—

“ ‘ Who will be able to endure the power and glory of the offspring produced by these two mighty beings ? ’ ”

“ They then took refuge with Shri Mahadeva, saying : ‘ O God of Gods, O Mahadeva, ever engaged in doing good to all beings, we offer salutations to thee, be gracious unto us ! Thy power, O First among the Gods, none can endure, therefore with this goddess engage in yogic penances. For the welfare of the three worlds, retain thine energy within thy body so that the universe may be preserved and may not suffer destruction ’ . ”

The Ruler of the World, Shri Mahadeva, listened to the words of the devas and said : “ Be it so, O Devas, I will restrain my power so that all the regions including the earth may dwell in peace, but O Devas, should my vital fluid overflow, who shall receive it ? ”

The gods answered Shri Mahadeva, saying : “ Let the earth receive it. ”

Then Shri Mahadeva let fall his seed on the earth covering the mountains, seas and forests. When the earth could bear no more, the devas asked the wind and fire deities to combine

¹ Parvati—The consort of the Lord Shiva.

² Devi—another name for Parvati. Devi literally means goddess or shining one.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

with that creative power and thus was a white mountain created and later a heavenly forest as resplendent as the light of the sun. From this fiery light was born the glorious Swami Karttikeya.¹

"All the gods and rishis were full of joy and adored the Lord Shiva and the goddess Uma. As they worshipped them with grateful hearts, Uma was filled with wrath and said : ' O Devas, your action has filled me with displeasure, you shall not escape the consequences.'

"Then Uma shining like the sun, took water in the palm of her hand and pronounced a curse on the gods, saying : ' O Devas, you have prevented me from bearing a son, may you be childless from this day, may your wives be without progeny.'

"Still not appeased, Uma cursed the earth also and said : ' O Earth, thou shalt never remain in one form, thou shalt have many masters. O Witless One, thou shalt never bear a son, since thou hast prevented me from becoming a mother.'

"Shri Mahadeva, seeing the devas discomfited, prepared to depart to the northern region of the Himalayas. There, on a peak named Himavatprabhava, he engaged in prolonged yogic practices together with Uma.

"O Rama, I have told thee of one of the two daughters of the Himalayas ; now with Lakshmana, listen to the tale of the other daughter of Himalaya, named Gunga."

CHAPTER 37

The king's elder daughter, Gunga

WHILST Shri Mahadeva was engaged in yogic meditation, the devas, under the leadership of Agni, went to the region of Brahma where, with Indra, they paid reverence to the Lord of the world, and said : " O Lord, at the beginning of creation thou did'st make Shri Mahadeva our leader, but he has now retired to the Himalayas and is engaged in the practice of austerity with Uma. O Thou who art desirous of the good

¹ Karttikeya—The God of War.

BALA KANDA

of the world, do what thou considerest ought to be done, thou art our only refuge."

Then Shri Brahma encouraged the devas, with gentle words, saying: "O Devas, the curse of Uma Devi, that you should remain without offspring is irrevocable, but the fire god Agni will cause Gunga to bear a son who will destroy the enemies of the gods. The youngest daughter of Himanchala (Uma) will look upon her sister's son as her own and will inevitably lavish her affection on him."

"O Rama, the words of Shri Brahma filled the gods with satisfaction and they offered obeisance to him. Then they all circumambulated Mount Kailasha,¹ the repository of precious metals, and begged Agni to beget a son.

"Agni acquiesced in their request and approaching Shri Gunga, said: 'O Devi, let us beget a son for it is the wish of the gods.'

"Assuming the form of a celestial nymph, Gunga, inspired the fire god to plant his seed in her, her every vein being filled with splendour. After a time, she addressed Agni, saying: 'O Deva, I am unable to bear the ever-increasing splendour which thou hast communicated to me. My body is burning like fire, my mind is agitated and I am filled with fear.'

"Agni replied: 'O Sinless One, place this foetus near the Himalayas.'

"Then Gunga Devi expelled the resplendent being, shining like gold. This substance, falling on the earth, became the purest gold that can be found. All objects in its proximity became silver and the more distant areas exposed to its penetrating rays became copper, the baser parts becoming zinc and lead. In this way, its brilliance was transmuted into metals and spread abroad and the mountains and forests near by were changed to gold. O Rama, gold being produced in that dazzling form is called jatarupa (form-born) and, O Hero, that is why gold shines like fire. The grass, the creepers, the shrubs, all were converted into gold, and from that splendour was born Kumara.

"The devas with Indra engaged the Krittikas² to nurse the

¹ Mount Kailasha—said to be the abode of Lord Shiva.

² Krittikas—The Pleiades, the six nurses of the God of War.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

child and they regarded him as their own son. The gods named the child Karttikeya and said : ' He shall be our son and he will be renowned in the three worlds.'

" The Krittikas bathed the child and as he grew, his form resembled the fire. Because the infant was born prematurely, the devas called him Skanda.

" The nurses began to nourish the child with milk and he shone like a flame. With six mouths he sucked the milk of six nurses at the same time. Soon he grew so powerful that while yet an infant he challenged groups of demons to combat. Then all the gods appointed him their commander-in-chief. The Devas and Agni paid affectionate homage to this child.

" O Rama, this is the inspiring and merit-bestowing story of Shri Gunga and Karttikeya.

" O Raghava, on this earth, those who read this narrative with faith and devotion shall have long lives, sons and grandsons and obtain the divine region of Skanda."

CHAPTER 38

The story of King Sagara, Shri Rama's ancestor

SHRI VISHWAMITRA in gentle accents, related this story to Shri Ramachandra, and then again addressed him, saying :—

" In ancient times there lived a king named Sagara, who ruled in Ayodhya. He was brave and virtuous and a lover of his subjects, yet he was without issue.

" The name of his chief queen was Keshini, a daughter of King Vidharba ; she was virtuous and truthful. His second queen was Sumati, a daughter of Arishtanemi and she was comely and charming.

" The king went to the Himalayas and engaged in severe yogic practices in the forest of Bhṛigu-prasravaṇa. When he had completed a hundred years' ascetic practices, the ever truthful Maharishi Bhṛigu was pleased with him and favoured

BALA KANDA

him with a boon. He said : ' O Sinless King, thou shalt beget many sons and thy fame will be immeasurable. From one of thy queens shall be born one son, and from the other sixty thousand sons.'

" When the queens heard of the boon granted by the rishi, they approached him saying : ' O Knower of God, we are certain that thy boon will bear fruit, please tell us therefore which of us will beget one son and which sixty thousand ? '

" Hearing their words, the highly virtuous Bhrigu said : ' That depends on your desires. Tell me, which of you would fain be the mother of the founder of the dynasty and which desires to beget sixty thousand illustrious sons ? '

" O Rama, Queen Keshini desired to be favoured by one son only, but Sumati, the sister of Garuda¹ obtained the boon of bearing sixty thousand powerful and illustrious sons.

" O Prince, the king offered salutations to the Rishi Bhrigu and with his consorts returned to the capital.

" When the time was ripe, the chief Queen Keshini gave birth to a son who was called Asamanjasa.

" O Great One, a gourd was brought forth by Queen Sumati from which, when opened, sixty thousand male infants emerged. The nurses placed them in jars full of butter and tended them. After a long time they attained to the state of adolescence, and then grew to manhood.

" O Rama, the eldest son of King Sagara, Asamanjasa used to seize hold of children and throw them into the river Sarayu. When he saw them drowning, he rejoiced. This evil doer grew up to oppress the good by his conduct.

" The citizens of King Sagara's capital exiled the prince, thus passing judgment on him. Asamanjasa became the father of a valiant prince named Anshuman, who was esteemed by everyone and addressed every man with courtesy.

" After a long time, King Sagara resolved to perform a sacrifice. O Rama, the king summoning the high priests began the initiatory rites."

¹ Garuda—a mythological bird, half man, half bird, the vehicle of Shri Vishnu, and the slayer of serpents. Garuda is said to have stolen the nectar of immortality from the gods, when it was churned from the ocean.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

CHAPTER 39

The horse with which he performs a sacrifice is stolen

HAVING listened to this tale, Shri Rama addressed the Muni Vishwamitra, who resembled the fire in splendour, and said : “ O Wise One, may prosperity constantly attend thee ! I desire to hear how my ancestor King Sagara performed the sacrifice.”

Shri Vishwamitra, highly gratified by Shri Rama’s eager enquiry, smilingly replied : “ Listen, O Rama, to the history of the high-souled King Sagara. There is a country between the Himalayas and the Vindhya mountains, and it was there that King Sagara performed his sacrifice. That land is suitable for this purpose, O Great Prince.

“ The great archer and warrior Anshuman was appointed the protector of the horse released for the sacrifice. A rakshasa in disguise, stole the horse and when it was being borne away, the priests approached the king, crying : ‘ See, someone is carrying off the horse, kill the thief and restore it.’ The king called for his sixty thousand sons and said : ‘ A wicked demon has stolen the sacrificial steed, in what direction has he borne it away ? It has been consecrated by mantrams to avoid obstructions ; seek the horse, my sons, and may success attend you. Scour the earth surrounded by the seas, and excavate the earth at my command, till the sacred horse is found. Having taken the initiation, I cannot leave this place. Go Ye, My Sons ! I shall remain here with Anshuman and the brahmins.’

“ O Rama, commanded by their father, those powerful princes joyfully started in search of the horse. O Great One ! they ranged the world in vain and began to dig the ground with their nails which were as sharp as diamonds.

“ O Prince of the House of Raghu, they used ploughs, spades and other implements to excavate the ground and the earth shook with the sound. While ploughing up the earth, many snakes, demons and powerful titans were slain and injured.

“ O Raghava, those mighty princes pierced the earth to the depth of sixty thousand miles and reached the antipodes. Having

BALA KANDA

pierced the earth with its mountains, they searched for the horse in Jambudwipa.¹

“The devas, gandharvas, asuras and nagas became agitated, and approached Shri Brahma ; bowing before him with their minds afflicted and in great distress, they said : ‘ O Blessed Lord, the sons of the Maharajah Sagara are digging up the whole earth and they have brought about the death of many great beings. Whosoever opposes them is slain with the words, “Thou art a thief, thou hast stolen the sacrificial horse ” ’.”

CHAPTER 40

The king's sons search for the horse ; they accuse Shri Kapila of stealing it and are reduced to ashes

“THE grandsire Shri Brahma, hearing the words of the gods regarding the sons of King Sagara, who were already doomed, said :—

“ ‘ O Devas, this whole world belongs to the glorious Vasudeva² and he, in the form of the Sage Kapila, supports it. These princes will fall victims to the wrath of holy Kapila ; the earth is eternal and cannot be destroyed.’ The gods, hearing these words, returned to their own regions, full of joy.

“Meanwhile, the uproar caused by the sons of Sagara digging the earth resembled the crash of thunder.

“Having encompassed the whole world, they returned to their father and said : ‘ We have traversed the whole world and have slain gods, demons and snakes, but we have found no trace of the sacrificial horse nor of the thief. O Father, may prosperity attend thee, be pleased to reflect on the matter and give us further instructions.’

“The great monarch replied in anger : ‘ Go, dig the earth once more, capture the horse, accomplish your purpose, then return.’

¹ Jambudwipa—one of the seven continents of which the world was made up.

² Vasudeva—a name of Vishnu.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

“In accordance with the command of their royal sire, the princes once more renewed their tunnelling and came upon the monstrous form of a great elephant which resembled a mountain.

“O Prince of Raghu, the whole earth and the mountains of that quarter are supported by that elephant Vimpaksha, and whenever, from fatigue, he moves his feet to ease himself, the whole world trembles and quakes.

“The princes bowed down to him and circumambulated him. They then continued digging deeper and deeper, first to the east, then to the west. To the south they saw the second great elephant whose name was Mahapadma. They beheld him supporting that quarter of the earth and were astonished; they offered him salutations.

“O Prince, the sons of King Sagara next dug the northern quarter of the earth and saw there a white elephant which resembled a heap of snow. His name was Hima-Pandara and his form was gigantic; they worshipped him as he stood supporting that quarter of the earth.

“Then with furious zeal, those mighty and valiant sons of Sagara dug the earth and proceeded to that renowned quarter where they saw Kapila the eternal Lord Vasudeva and the horse grazing near him.

“O Rama, they were glad, thinking that it was Shri Kapila who had stolen the horse. Full of wrath, seizing ploughs, trees, rocks and stones, they ran towards him, crying: ‘Thou art the stealer of the sacrificial horse, thou art the thief. O Wicked One, we, the sons of King Sagara, have found thee.’

“O Rama, Shri Kapila, hearing these words, filled with rage, uttered the sound ‘H’m’ and instantly by his immeasurable power all the sons of Sagara were reduced to ashes.”

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER 4 I

King Sagara's grandson, Anshuman, finds the horse and the ashes of his uncles. He is told the funeral rites must be performed with the waters of the holy river Gunga

“O RAMACHANDRA, perceiving that a long period had elapsed since the departure of his sons, King Sagara spoke to his powerful and resplendent grandson Anshuman :

“‘O Child, thou art valiant, learned and illustrious like thine ancestors, go and seek thine uncles and the stealer of the horse also. The interior of the earth is inhabited by the most mighty beings, arm thyself therefore with sword, bow and arrows. Pay reverence to those worthy to be worshipped whom thou dost encounter on the way and make obeisance to them ; slay those who obstruct thy purpose, then successful, return and ensure the completion of the sacrifice.’

“Thus instructed by his grandfather, Prince Anshuman, arming himself with sword, bow and arrows, speedily departed. Honoured on the way by devas, danavas, asuras and nagas, pisachas, birds and serpents, he came to the mighty and resplendent elephant and worshipped him, enquiring as to his welfare. The elephant said in reply : ‘O Prince Anshuman, thou wilt accomplish thy purpose and soon return to the capital.’

“The prince proceeded further and enquired in the same manner of each of the other great elephants. They all advised the prince, who had paid due respect to them, to proceed further. As instructed by them, Anshuman came to the place where the heaped ashes of his uncles’ bodies were lying. Overcome with grief, Anshuman wept to see that death had overtaken them. Afflicted with distress and pain, he suddenly perceived the sacrificial horse grazing near by. Desirous of offering the rite of water for his departed relatives, he looked round but could find no water anywhere. Extending his gaze, he saw his maternal uncle, the holy eagle, who addressed the prince as follows :—

“‘O Lion among men, grieve not, these princes have met the death they deserved. They have been consumed to ashes

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

by the Mahatma Kapila of unimaginable glory. O Wise One, it is not meet to offer the usual rites for them. O Great One, perform the rites with the water of the holy river Gunga, the Daughter of Himalaya. When the waters of the purifier of the world, the sacred Gunga flow over their ashes, the ceremony will be crowned with success and the sixty thousand princes will be received into heaven'."

The illustrious and mighty Prince Anshuman listened to the words of Shri Garuda and speedily returning with the horse, approached King Sagara, who still awaited the completion of the initiatory rites; he related to him all that the eagle had said. The monarch completed the sacrifice and returned to his capital considering the means whereby he might cause Shri Gunga to descend to earth; but in vain.

King Sagara, unable to devise any way to accomplish this matter, having ruled for thirty thousand years, departed hence.

CHAPTER 42

Anshuman's son, Dilipa, fails and his son Bhagiratha performs austerities to induce the holy river to descend

AFTER his death, the ministers installed the virtuous Anshuman as king. O Rama, glorious was the reign of King Anshuman. He was succeeded by his son, the world-renowned Dilipa.

King Anshuman, leaving his kingdom to Dilipa, retired to the top of a Himalayan peak and began to perform severe yogic austerities. Having passed thirty-two thousand years in this wise, without inducing the sacred river Gunga to descend on earth, he gave up his life.

Acquainted with the fate of his great uncles, and overcome with grief, the mighty sovereign Dilipa found no means of bringing the sacred stream down to earth. Consumed with anxiety, he reflected daily on how he should accomplish the descent of the Gunga and perform the funeral rites for the deliverance of the souls of his ancestors. The righteous and

BALA KANDA

illustrious King Dilipa, constantly engaged in these reflections, was then blessed with the birth of a virtuous son, Bhagiratha.

The renowned monarch Dilipa observing many sacrifices, ruled over his kingdom for thirty thousand years ; his thoughts were ever devoted to the deliverance of the souls of his forbears until stricken with disease, he was claimed by death. Having bequeathed the kingdom to his son Bhagiratha, his spirit ascended to the region of Indra.

O Rama, Bhagiratha was a virtuous and royal sage, but he had no heir and was desirous of obtaining a son. O Raghava, he entrusted the administration of his kingdom to his ministers and proceeded to the holy place named Gokarna where he practised yogic penances to attract the descent of the holy Gunga. With arms uplifted and senses controlled, he stood in the midst of five fires in the hottest season, partaking of food once a month only, and continued thus for a thousand years.

O Mighty Prince, after a thousand years, Shri Brahma, the Lord and Ruler of the world, was pleased with Bhagiratha and, accompanied by the devas, approached the high-souled king and said :

“ O Bhagiratha, thy virtuous yogic practices have elicited our admiration ; ask for a boon, O Fortunate One.”

The highly resplendent Bhagiratha, with joined palms submissively addressed Shri Brahma, saying : “ O Blessed Lord, if thou art pleased to confer the fruits of mine austerities on me and grant me a boon, then allow me to deliver the souls of the sons of King Sagara by offering them water at their funeral rites, from the sacred stream. O Lord, do thou also grant as a further boon that the Dynasty of Ikshwaku may be preserved and I may have an heir.”

The Grandsire of the whole world listened to the prayer of the Maharajah Bhagiratha and answered him in gentle and pleasing accents :—

“ O Mighty King Bhagiratha, thou hast asked a great boon, may success attend thee ! Let thy desire for a son be fulfilled. O King, when the Gunga, the eldest daughter of Himalaya falls on the earth with overwhelming power, the earth will not be

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

able to sustain her ; none but the Lord Shiva can accomplish this."

Having uttered these words to King Bhagiratha and having spoken to Shri Gunga also, Shri Brahma returned with the gods to his own region.

CHAPTER 43

*Lord Shiva lets loose the sacred river which follows
King Bhagiratha's celestial chariot*

SHRI BRAHMA having departed, the King Bhagiratha, standing on the tip of one toe, adored Shri Shiva for a full year. O Mighty One, with arms uplifted, living on air, unsupported, fixed like a pillar, day and night King Bhagiratha offered his adorations to the Lord.

A full year having passed, the Lord of Uma, Shri Mahadeva, who is adored by the whole world, spoke to King Bhagiratha as follows : " O Great One, I am pleased with thee, I will accomplish what thou desirest, I will receive the descent of Gunga on my head."

Then the holy Gunga, the eldest daughter of Himalaya, the object of reverence to the whole world, assuming the form of a mighty river, descended with torrential force on to the head of Shiva. The goddess reflected within herself that she would bear down the Lord Mahadeva to the antipodes. Shri Shiva, reading her thoughts, grew angry and determined to detain the mighty stream in his hair. Resembling the majestic Himalayas, the locks of Shri Shiva held the falling Gunga fast and the sacred river remained imprisoned there. For innumerable years the Gunga wandered round and round in the locks of Shri Mahadeva and could not find an egress.

O Rama, when Shri Bhagiratha did not see the holy stream descending to earth, he again began his penance in order to propitiate the Lord of the world.

Then Shri Shiva let loose the Gunga in the Brindusara lake

BALA KANDA

and as it fell it divided itself into seven streams. The three branches conferring prosperity, Hladini, Pavani and Nalini, flowed towards the east from the head of holy Shiva.

Then the sacred Gunga of pure and delightful water was divided into three further branches, Suchakshu, Sita and Sindhav, all flowing towards the west. The seventh of these streams followed the chariot of the Maharajah Bhagiratha.

The royal sage, riding in a beautiful chariot, went forward and the sacred river Gunga followed him.

Thus did the holy river descend from heaven on to the forehead of Shri Mahadeva and from thence came to the surface of the earth.

The fall of the sacred stream created a mighty reverberation, her waters flowing through beautiful ways. Riding their aerial chariots as large as cities, containing elephants and horses, the gods, sages, celestial musicians, yakshas and siddhas in great numbers, came to witness the holy Ganges falling from heaven to earth. In their aerial chariots named Pariplava, the gods came to see this wonderful event of the holy river flowing on the earth, and as they descended from the skies, the splendour of their celestial ornaments irradiated the cloudless canopy of heaven as if a thousand suns had risen there.

The mercurial fishes and aquatic creatures leaping from the stream thrown up by the force of the current, shone like lightning in the sky, whilst the foam and spray scattered on all sides resembled flocks of swans in flight or clouds in winter.

The waters of the holy Gunga sometimes rose high in the air, sometimes flowed tortuously, sometimes broadened out, sometimes dashed against the rocks and sometimes spouted upwards afterwards falling to the ground ; that pure water capable of removing sin looked delightful flowing on the surface of the earth.

Then the celestial sages and heavenly musicians and the denizens of the earth, reverently touched that sacred stream falling from the locks of Shiva.

Those beings, who through a curse, had fallen from the heavenly regions and been made to dwell on earth, were cleansed of their transgressions by bathing in the holy Gunga. Purified and freed from their sins, those resplendent beings returned to the heavenly regions, passing through the sky.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Wherever the sacred Ganges flowed, people were cleansed of their sins by bathing in its waters.

King Bhagiratha, riding a celestial chariot, drove on and Shri Gunga followed after him.

O Rama, the gods, the sages, rakshasas, asuras, yakshas, the chief serpents and nymphs following King Bhagiratha, together with the aquatic beings and swans, attended the sacred river. Whichever course King Bhagiratha took, that mighty river Gunga, the Destroyer of all sin, followed. Flowing on and on, Shri Gunga arrived where the Sage Jahnu, worker of miracles, was performing a sacrifice. Then the sacred river swept over the sacrificial pavilion and all it contained. The Rishi Jahnu perceiving the pride of Gungaji, grew angry and drank up the whole of the water of that river, verily a great miracle !

The devas, gandharvas and sages were astonished and began to worship that Mahatma Jahnu, saying, "From to-day the holy river shall be called thy daughter". The mighty Jahnu being pleased, let loose the river through his ears. From thence Shri Gunga is called Jahnavi (the daughter of Jahnu). Thereafter she once again flowed behind the chariot of King Bhagiratha. Finally, the holy Gunga reached the sea and entered the lower regions to fulfil the purpose of the king.

The royal Sage Bhagiratha attended by the sacred river, gazed with grief on the ashes of his ancestors. O Prince of the House of Raghu, as soon as the holy stream touched the ashes, the sons of King Sagara were resuscitated, freed from sin, and attained the celestial region.

CHAPTER 44

King Bhagiratha completes the funeral rites for his ancestors

WHEN the king attended by the holy Gunga, reached the seashore, he entered the subterranean region where the sons of King Sagara had been burnt to ashes.

BALA KANDA

“ O Rama, as the holy water flowed over the ashes, Shri Brahma the Lord of all the worlds, addressed King Bhagiratha as follows : ‘ O Great King, thou hast redeemed the sixty thousand sons of King Sagara, who now dwell in the heavenly region. O King, as long as the waters of the sea continue on earth, so long shall the sons of King Sagara in celestial form enjoy heaven. Henceforth, O Great Sovereign, Shri Gunga shall be thy eldest daughter and be known by thy name throughout the earth. This sacred river shall be named Shri Gunga, Tripathaga¹ and Bhagirathi.

“ ‘ O King, perform the funeral rites of thine ancestors and fulfil thy prescribed duty. The mighty King Sagara was not able to accomplish this purpose and King Anshuman of limitless prowess also failed to obtain the fulfilment of his devout desire. Thy father Dilipa, equal to ourselves in merit and a warrior fully established in the duties of his caste, that illustrious Dilipa besought the holy Gunga to descend to earth in vain. This great design has been accomplished by thee alone. Thou hast acquired undying renown throughout the world.

“ ‘ By achieving this, thou art possessed of the highest dharma. O Great Sovereign, now do thou bathe in the holy stream also. O Lion among men, purify thyself and acquire merit, then perform the funeral rites of thine ancestors. O King, may prosperity attend thee, return to thy capital, I shall now ascend to my own abode.’

“ The mighty and illustrious Brahma then ascended to heaven and the royal Sage Bhagiratha, having performed the obsequies of the sons of King Sagara, with the water of the sacred Ganges, returned to his capital.

“ Enjoying every felicity, King Bhagiratha began to govern once more and his people rejoiced that he had again assumed rulership. All were freed from suffering and anxiety and they increased in wealth and prosperity.

“ O Rama, I have narrated the story of the descent of Shri Gunga fully to thee. May prosperity attend thee ! Dusk has fallen and the hour of the evening prayer has come. This story gives wealth, prosperity, fame, longevity, sons, and residence

¹ Tripathaga—three way going.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

in heaven to the reader. He who causes it to be heard by others whether he be a brahmin or a kshatriya, brings joy to his ancestors and the gods.

“O Ramachandra, he who with fixed attention listens to this story, shall obtain all he desires, his sins will be remitted and he will obtain long life and renown.”

CHAPTER 45

Vishwamitra begins to relate the story of the city of Vishala and the churning of the ocean, which leads to the combat between the devas and the daityas

SHRI RAMACHANDRA and Shri Lakshmana were filled with astonishment on hearing the words of Shri Vishwamitra, and said to him: “O Holy Sage, marvellous indeed is the history of King Sagara and the descent of the Ganges, which thou hast related to us.”

The night drew on as they had been listening to the story, and Shri Rama and Lakshmana passed the remaining hours meditating on the matter.

The clear day dawned and Shri Rama, having performed his daily devotions, said to Shri Vishwamitra: “The night has passed in listening to this divine narrative, it has slipped away, as if it were a moment. Now let us cross the sacred and merit-giving stream reflecting on its marvellous origin. Knowing thee to have come, the other sages have sent a boat in preparation for crossing the holy river.”

Shri Vishwamitra summoned the ferryman and with the princes and sages all were conveyed to the other side. They rested awhile on the opposite bank and entertained the sages in their company. In the distance, they saw the city named Vishala and soon the great Rishi Vishwamitra with the princes reached that place of beauty, which resembled one of Indra's cities.

Then Rama, full of wisdom, approached the holy sage and

BALA KANDA

humbly made enquiry concerning the city. He said: "O Great Sage, what royal and illustrious house rules here? I desire to hear."

At these words of Rama, the holy sage began to relate the story of the city as follows :—

"O Rama, attend! I will tell thee the story of this city, which I heard from Indra.

"In the golden age (Satya Yuga) Diti¹ gave birth to a powerful son Daitya, an asura, and Aditi¹ gave birth to the highly fortunate and exceedingly righteous son Devata, a celestial being. These two sagacious beings sought to become immortal, incorruptible and free from disease, old age and other ills. After reflecting on this matter, they resolved to churn Kshiroda (the ocean of milk) and obtain from it the water of immortality. Using the mighty snake Vasuki as a rope and the Mandara mountain as the churn, they began to churn the ocean. When they had done so for a thousand years, the snake Vasuki bit the rocks with its teeth and threw up venom. From this was produced the great poison which began to consume men, gods, demons and the whole world.

"The gods took refuge with the Lord Shiva and worshipped him crying 'Protect us, protect us'. Attracted by the mournful cry of the gods, Shri Mahadeva and Shri Hari³ appeared there with conch and disc.

"Shri Vishnu³ smilingly addressed the bearer of the trident, Shri Mahadeva, and said: 'O Lord, thou art the chief of the gods and should'st, therefore, accept whatever is first produced by the churning of the ocean. Receive the poison as thy gift, the first tribute.'

"Having spoken thus, Shri Vishnu disappeared, and the Blessed Lord Shiva, moved by the distress of the gods and the words of Shri Vishnu, drank the dreadful poison, as if it were nectar, and returned to Kailasha.

"O Prince of Raghu, the devas and the daityas began churning once more, but the churning staff began to sink. Then the devas and gandharvas praised the Lord Vishnu, saying: 'O

¹ Diti—a goddess, mother of the titans, daityas.

² Aditi—a goddess, denoting "infinity", mother of the gods, adityas.

³ Shri Hari—another title of the Lord Vishnu.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Blessed Lord, Thou art the Master of all beings, thou art the asylum of the gods—protect us all, O Great Lord, and support the sinking Mandara mountain.’

“Shri Vishnu, assuming the form of a tortoise, entered the ocean and supported the mountain on his back. Taking hold of the peak in his hand, the blessed Vishnu churned the ocean, standing between the devas and the asuras.

“After a thousand years, Shri Dhanwantari,¹ the teacher of the Ayur Veda appeared, holding a staff and loshta in his hands ; thereafter many nymphs emerged. O Raghava, they were called apsarās, ‘ap’ meaning water and ‘yara’ to ‘emerge from’ ; on this account these beautiful damsels were named ‘apsarās.’ O Rama, they numbered six hundred million and their female attendants were innumerable. None were received either by the devas or the daityas, hence they remained without a lord.

“Then, O Prince, Varuni,² the daughter of the god Varuna² was born. The sons of Aditi did not accept her, but the asuras gladly did so. Those who rejected her were called suras³ (devas) and those who received her became merry and were called asuras.

“O Raghava, then the celestial horse Uchchaisravas and the jewel Kaustubha also rose out of the sea, and they were succeeded by the water of immortality.

“O Rama, the devas fought with the danavas⁴ for possession of the nectar and the daityas allied themselves with the asuras in this struggle ; terrible indeed was this combat.

“After many had lost their lives in the fight, Shri Vishnu assumed the form of Mohini, a charming woman the product of Maya⁵ and stole the nectar from the combatants.

“Those who opposed the imperishable Vishnu were destroyed by him. In this conflict the gods slew countless daityas.⁶ Indra, after slaying the asuras, became the king of the devas and with the help of the sages began to rule with joy.”

¹ Dhanwantari—physician of the gods.

² Varuni—literally “wine”, the daughter of Varuna, the Lord of waters.

³ Suras—another name for the gods.

⁴ Danavas—Giants who warred against the gods.

⁵ Maya—the indescribable, indefinable principle or power by which all creatures are deluded. (For further explanation refer to glossary.)

⁶ Daityas—Titans.

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER 46

Diti undergoes severe austerities for the birth of a son

“O RAMA, learning that her children had been slain, Diti was much afflicted and approached her husband Kasyapa¹ with the words: ‘O Lord, by thy powerful sons, am I bereft of my children. I desire a son who will be able to destroy Indra, though to this end I must undergo great penance. Such austerities I will perform, if thou wilt grant me a son that is mighty, valorous, strong-willed and firm of purpose.’

“The holy sage answered the afflicted Diti saying: ‘Be it so! Remain chaste for a thousand years, thou shalt then bear a son capable of destroying Indra. By my grace, thy child shall be the ruler of the three worlds.’

“Thus did the sage console Diti, and blessing her, departed to practise penance. Diti retired contentedly to the forest of Kushaplava and began to undergo severe austerities.

“Indra then, coming there, paid reverence to her and began to serve her with humility, supplying her with fire, kusha grass² and other necessities, massaging her body when she became weak from the severity of ascetic practices. O Rama, Indra served Diti for a thousand years less ten days.

“Then Diti joyfully addressed Indra saying: ‘O Indra, thy father has promised to grant me a son after a thousand years penance. Thou shalt soon behold thy brother, whom I desire shall overcome thee. With him thou shalt share the three worlds and be happy, have no anxiety.’

“By this time the afternoon had come. Diti overcome with sleep, placing her feet where her head had lain, carelessly assumed an impure posture.

“Indra rejoiced and laughed aloud. Entering her body, he cut the foetus into seven pieces with his great mace. Diti’s slumber was interrupted by the cry of the child in her womb.

¹ Kasyapa—a Vedic sage.

² Kusha grass—sacred grass used in religious ceremonies, a grass of long stalks and pointed leaves. (*Desmostachya bipinnata*.)

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Indra said to it 'Do not weep', 'Do not weep', and again divided the child with his mace, despite Diti's cries, 'Do not destroy it, do not destroy it'.

"Then Indra paused in his murderous assault and with extreme humility addressed Diti saying 'O Diti, thou wast impure through sleeping with thy feet towards the head of the couch, thou did'st thus occupy an improper posture. I have, therefore, severed thine unborn child into seven parts, since he was to be the cause of my destruction. O Devi, pardon me'."

CHAPTER 47

*The holy sage and the princes arrive at Vishala
and are welcomed by King Pramati*

KNOWING the foetus to be divided into seven parts, Diti was greatly perturbed and said to Indra :—

"Through my fault has this come to pass ; O Indra, thou art in no wise guilty. This child being divided, for thy good and mine own, I declare that these seven shall become the protectors of the forty-nine winds. These seven sons of divine appearance shall be known as the Bala-kanda winds. Let one wander about in the region of Brahma, another in the region of Indra, and the third in space. Let the remaining four winds go anywhere under thy instructions ; may they all be known by the name of Maruts, conferred on them by thee."

With joined palms, the thousand-eyed god Indra said in reply to Diti : "O Devi, it will assuredly come to pass as thou desireth. Thy sons shall wander about in the form of devas in the Tapovana forest."

Thus reconciled and fully satisfied the mother and son ascended to heaven.

Thus have I heard, O Rama ! This is that Tapovana forest in which Indra formerly served his mother Diti. O Lion among Men, here a great city was founded by the righteous Prince Vishala, the son of King Ikswaku and Alambusa.

BALA KANDA

O Rama, the mighty son of Vishala was named Hemachandra, and his son was the renowned Suchandra. O Rama, the son of Suchandra was Dhumrashwa and his son was Srinjaya. The glorious Sahadeva was the son of Srinjaya and the son of Sahadeva was the highly virtuous Krishashwa.

The son of Krishashwa was Somadatta and his son was Kakustha. The most illustrious and invincible of warriors King Pramati the son of Kakustha, is the present ruler of Vishala.

By the grace of King Ikswaku all the rulers of Vishala are long lived, virtuous and mighty.

O Rama, let us pass the night here, and to-morrow we will wait upon King Janaka.

When the powerful King Pramati heard of Shri Vishwamitra's arrival in his kingdom, he went with his spiritual preceptor and relatives to welcome him.

With joined palms, they offered him due worship and enquired as to his welfare. The king said: "O Muni, to-day I am indeed fortunate that thou hast been gracious enough to visit my kingdom. None is more blessed than I."

CHAPTER 48

*They come to Gautama's hermitage and Vishwamitra
relates its story*

KING PRAMATI having enquired as to the well-being of Shri Vishwamitra, said :—

"O Holy Sage, may the Lord protect those two youths ; be gracious enough to tell me who they may be. These princes, equal to the gods in power, walking with the gait of an elephant, fearless as lions or bulls in combat, whose eyes resemble lotuses, who are armed with swords, bows and quivers, who rival the heavenly Aswins¹ in beauty and who, in the flower of their

¹ Aswins—celestial horsemen, twin sons of Surya, the sun, precursors of the dawn.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

youth, appear like gods, visiting the earth. Why are they travelling on foot? Whose sons are they? Why are they come? Enhancing the earth as the sun and moon illumine the sky; their manner of address and bearing showing them to be kinsmen, why are these two heroes of high descent, bearing mighty weapons, found on this hard path? I long to hear."

Shri Vishwamitra related to the king the whole story of the visit to the Siddha Ashrama and the slaying of the asuras.

The king was highly gratified to meet the princes, and perceiving them to be virtuous, entertained them with the greatest respect. Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana having received hospitality from King Pramati, passed the night there. The following day they left for Mithilapuri, the capital of King Janaka.

When they beheld the city at a distance, they cried out: "How beautiful, how beautiful it is!" Thereafter, finding a charming hermitage which was uninhabited, Rama enquired of the Rishi Vishwamitra as follows: "O Sage, how can it be that this beautiful hermitage is unfrequented? O Lord, tell us whose has been this hermitage?"

Shri Vishwamitra, chief among the eloquent, answered Rama, saying: "O Prince, hear the true story of this hermitage, I will relate to thee who was its author and how he cursed it in anger.

"O Rama, this place, a source of wonder even to the gods, belonged to the Rishi Gautama and resembled the abode of the celestials. Here with Ahalya, the sage practised Yoga for thousands of years.

"O Rama, one day, the sage having gone to a distant place, Indra, finding Ahalya alone, assumed his form, and said to her: 'O Fair One, I am overcome by desire, let us carry out our conjugal duty.'

"O Raghava, though Ahalya recognized Indra disguised as her lord, yet she acceded to his request. Then Ahalya addressed Indra saying: 'O Indra, I am highly gratified, now depart quickly, unobserved. O Chief of the gods, preserve me and thyself from Gautama.'

"Indra laughed and answered: 'O Thou of beautiful waist,

BALA KANDA

to-day I rejoice, I will now depart for my own region.' On this, he sought to leave the hut of Ahalya.

"O Rama, at that instant he observed the Rishi Gautama entering the hut and he became agitated and anxious. Seeing the holy sage unconquered by devas or danavas, endowed with the power of Yoga, drenched with holy water, shining like fire, holding the sacred fuel and kusha grass in his hands, Indra was terrified and grew pale.

"Shri Gautama perceiving Indra in his own guise and judging by his guilty looks that he was leaving his spouse having committed sin with her, cursed him saying :—

" ' O Wicked Wretch, assuming my form, thou hast committed this sinful act. Be thou impotent.' Cursed by the Rishi Gautama, Indra was instantly deprived of his manhood. Then the Sage Gautama cursed Ahalya also saying : ' Thou shalt remain immovable in this place for thousands of years, thy food the wind alone. Thou shalt be as dust, invisible to all creatures. When Rama, the son of Dasaratha visits this forest, then shalt thou be cleansed from thy sin. Having served him, O Deluded One without desire for personal gain, thou shalt be restored to me in thy present body.'

"Thus did the illustrious Gautama curse the wicked Ahalya and, abandoning the hermitage, began his yogic penances, on the beautiful peak of Himalaya, inhabited by siddhas."

CHAPTER 49

Shri Rama liberates Ahalya from Gautama's curse and departs for Mithila

DEPRIVED of his virility, Indra grew melancholy, and addressing Agni and the other gods, said : "By obstructing the ascetic practices of the Mahatma Gautama, who sought to usurp my power, I have verily served the purpose of the gods. Evoking his wrath, by causing him to curse me and denounce Ahalya,

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

I have robbed the rishi of his spiritual power, therefore, O Devas, O Divine Beings, help me now to recover my manhood."

Then the gods with Agni at their head, approached the pittris, kavyavahanas and other beings and said to them : " Indra has been deprived of his virility ; this ram of yours is in full possession of its powers, allow us to graft the testicles of the ram on to Indra, we can compensate the ram in this wise—from to-day, let those who desire to propitiate you, offer the sacrifice of a castrated ram and receive the reward of great merit at your hands."

The pittris did as requested by Agni and grafted the testicles of the ram on to Indra. From that time, O Rama, they have accepted the sacrifice of a gelded ram.

This event proves the immeasurable power of the practices of the holy sage. Now let us enter his hermitage. O Rama, do thou liberate the unfortunate Ahalya, so that she may once more resume her nymph-like form."

Shri Rama accepted the command and entered the hermitage, preceded by the Sage Vishwamitra. There they beheld Ahalya, by virtue of her yogic practices. Unperceived by devas, asuras or men, it seemed as if Brahma had created her with his own hands as a great mistress of occult powers. Resembling the full moon veiled in mist or the reflection of the sun in water or a bright fire wreathed in smoke, by the curse of the Rishi Gautama she remained invisible and thus it was ordained she should remain till she beheld Shri Ramachandra and till that hour, none in the three worlds should look on her.

With the deepest reverence did Shri Rama and Lakshmana touch the feet of Ahalya and she, remembering the words of the Rishi Gautama fell down in devotion before them. Thereafter, she entertained them with due hospitality, as enjoined in the scriptures, while the two princes acknowledged the honour paid to them. At this moment a rain of flowers fell from the sky, scattered by the gods ; heavenly musicians sang and celestial nymphs danced whilst all rejoiced and paid homage to Ahalya.

The illustrious Sage Gautama becoming aware of the matter through his divine powers, repaired to the hermitage and rejoiced to behold Ahalya restored to her former state. Re-united, they

BALA KANDA

both worshipped the glorious Rama and then resumed their spiritual life together.

Shri Rama, having accepted the homage offered to him, departed thence for Mithila.

CHAPTER 50

They are welcomed at the place of sacrifice by King Janaka

PRECEDED by Shri Vishwamitra, Shri Rama and Lakshmana came to the king's place of sacrifice. Beholding the sacrificial pavilion, they said to the holy sage: "How well has the great Janaka prepared for the sacrifice! O August Rishi, thousands of brahmins learned in the Vedas, from many lands, with hundreds of bullock carts transporting their possessions, can be seen here. O Holy Father, let us choose a place where thou mayest rest."

The Sage thereupon selected a place which was secluded and supplied with water.

Hearing of the arrival of Shri Vishwamitra, King Janaka, accompanied by his illustrious priest, Shri Shatananda, and many others, hastened to that place and humbly offered obeisance to the holy sage. Then the king placed the traditional gifts of water sweetened with honey¹ before him and he, accepting the gifts, enquired as to the king's welfare and further whether the sacrifice was proceeding without hindrance; he then duly inquired concerning the welfare of Shri Shatananda and other holy men in attendance on their sovereign.

The king received all with a cheerful countenance and with joined palms said to Shri Vishwamitra: "O August Lord, please be seated with the other great sages." Thus requested, they sat down, after which Janaka with his family priest, brahmins and counsellors occupied their places, the king seated in the midst of his ministers.

¹ Madhuparka—a mixture of curds, butter, honey and the milk of coconut—a traditional offering.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Having attended to the due placing of his guests, the illustrious sovereign said : " O Lord, to-day, by the grace of the gods, all the preparations for the sacrifice have been carried out, now by thine advent here I have acquired merit equal to the fruit of my sacrifice. Blessed am I that thou hast honoured the place of sacrifice with thy presence. O Divine Sage, the high priests have informed me that the sacrifice will be completed in the course of twelve days, the gods will then come to take their share ; Thou, O Illustrious Lord, shalt behold them."

Having thus addressed the sage, the king again earnestly enquired of him, saying : " May prosperity attend thee ! O Sage, who are these two illustrious princes, equalling the gods in power, whose bearing resembles the majesty of an elephant, or a lion, who are valiant and whose eyes are like lotuses, who are armed with swords, bows and quivers and whose beauty rivals the Aswini-Kumara, who are youthful and appear to have descended from heaven to earth like the gods ? Have they come here on foot ? Whose sons are they ? They, whose eyes are wide set and who are armed with sacred weapons, who wear their hair like Karttikeya¹ and who captivate the hearts of men by their magnanimous and virtuous qualities ? Surely they are come hither to exalt our hearts and add to the fame of our dynasty ? Adorning the earth as the sun or moon adorn the sky, in stature and bearing resembling each other, O Great Sage, whose sons are they ? Please tell me all ! "

Hearing the words of King Janaka, Shri Vishwamitra said : " These are the sons of King Dasaratha."

He then told the king of their residence in the Siddha-Asrama and of the slaying of the demons, of their visit to Vishala and the rescue of Ahalya, also of their meeting with the Sage Gautama. Then he said : " Now have we come to see the great bow."

Having related all this to the king, the great muni became silent.

¹ Karttikeya—the god of war ; the hair was shaved on the crown and the two side pieces like crows' wings left at the side.

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER 5 I

*Gautama's son, Shatananda, relates more of the story
of the Sage Vishwamitra*

HAVING heard the words of the wise Vishwamitra, Shri Shatananda, the eldest son of the Sage Gautama, resplendent by virtue of his practice of Yoga, was filled with wonder and delight and, beholding Shri Rama was astonished.

Seeing the two princes sitting at their ease, Shri Shatananda said to the Sage Vishwamitra : " O Holy Sage, was my mother, so long involved in the practice of austerity, shown by thee to Shri Ramachandra ? O Illustrious One, did my mother entertain these two heroes worthy of adoration with fruits and those things she was able to obtain in the hermitage ?

" O Holy Rishi, didst thou relate the story of the improper behaviour of Indra to my mother in bygone days, to Shri Ramachandra ? O Holy One, by virtue of the advent of Shri Rama, did my mother obtain my father's favour once more ? O Kaushika, did my father duly honour Shri Ramachandra and is this Illustrious One, having received the hospitality of my parents, really come hither ? O Holy Sage, please tell me ; when my tranquil-minded sire entered the hermitage, was he honoured by Shri Rama ? "

Shri Vishwamitra, skilled in the art of converse and acquainted with the laws of rhetoric, answered Shri Shatananda saying :—

" O Great Muni, I did that which should be done, by speaking that which was proper to the occasion, and patiently listening to that which was spoken, recollecting my duty. As Jamadagni, who first cursed Renuka and was then reconciled to her, so has thy father shown favour to thy mother and received her again."

Hearing the words of Shri Vishwamitra, the great Shatananda addressed Shri Ramachandra, saying : " O Great One, may thy coming be the source of prosperity to all. It is fortunate indeed that thou didst visit my father's hermitage and restore my mother to her former state. How can I sufficiently praise that mighty Sage Shri Vishwamitra, revered by all the sages. O Rama, enlightened are his actions ; by virtue of his

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI'

holy practices he has become a brahmarishi¹ though previously a royal sage. Among brahmarishis he is unique, he is known to me as one who is ever concerned with the good of all. O Rama, none is equal to thee on earth, since thou art protected by so great a sage as Vishwamitra. Hear while I relate the story of the great Kaushika² to thee :—

“In the past, this holy sage was a virtuous monarch, versed in all branches of learning, delighting in the welfare of his subjects and the destroyer of his foes.

“Kusha, the righteous and powerful king, was the son of Prajapati, and his son was Gadhi, and the great and illustrious Sage Vishwamitra is the son of Gadhi.

“On ascending the throne, King Vishwamitra ruled the earth for many thousands of years. At a certain time, King Vishwamitra, assembling his army, set out to range the earth. O Rama, he passed through many cities and kingdoms and crossed innumerable rivers, mountains and forests, visiting many hermitages till he came to the one belonging to Shri Vasishta. This hermitage was thickly planted with many-branched trees with dense foliage in which birds of every kind dwelt. Many species of beasts frequented that place, and the siddhas also came there—devas, gandharvas and other celestial beings added to the peace and beauty of that hermitage by their presence. Beautiful birds flew about and peaceful deer wandered here and there. Many learned brahmins also dwelt in that hermitage.

“Brahmin sages and also celestial rishis inhabited that place, so that it shone like fire by virtue of their presence. This hermitage sheltered many great Vedic scholars equal to Brahma, some living only on air, some on water, some on dry leaves. Other sages lived on fruit and roots, and there were in addition thousands of brahmacharis fully self-subdued.

“Each sage observed the sacred traditions, performing his morning and evening devotions, repeating the silent prayer (japa) offering water to the spirits of his ancestors, and pouring oblations into the sacrificial fire.

¹ Brahmarishi—There are four kinds of sages or rishis : The Rajarishi or royal sage, the Maharishi or great sage, the Brahmarishi or sacred sage and the Devarishi or divine sage. The ascending scale culminates in the Devarishi.

² Kaushika—The name of Vishwamitra, he being the son of King Kusika, or Kusha.

BALA KANDA

“Many retired householders practising Yoga, dwelt there with their wives. Verily that hermitage resembled the abode of Brahma, and the great and powerful King Vishwamitra rejoiced to behold it.”

CHAPTER 52

*How King Vishwamitra visits Shri Vasishtha's hermitage
and accepts hospitality provided by the wish-fulfilling cow,
Shabala*

BEHOLDING the hermitage, the mighty Vishwamitra filled with joy, bowed with great humility to Shri Vasishtha who was engaged in the telling of his rosary.

Shri Vasishtha welcomed the king and bade him be seated, and he having done so was offered the fruits and roots that grew in that place.

Honoured by the holy sage, King Vishwamitra enquired of him if all were well with the fire sacrifice, his spiritual practices and his disciples. Shri Vasishtha related to him all that concerned his welfare and the welfare of those in the hermitage, even to the trees themselves.

Sitting at ease, Shri Vasishtha said to King Vishwamitra, eminent among yogis and a son of Shri Brahma himself: “O King, is it well with thee in all ways? Dost thou give satisfaction to thy subjects in accordance with the law of righteousness and dost thou rule and protect thy people according to the spiritual law? Is thy revenue justly received and increased? Is it judiciously administered and distributed to those who are eligible and deserving? Are thy servants remunerated at the proper season? Do thy subjects willingly obey thee? O Sovereign, hast thou subdued thine enemies? O Sinless King, is it well with thine army, thy treasury, thy friends, thy sons and grandsons?”

In reply to these questions, King Vishwamitra humbly answered: “All is well, my Lord!”

Conversing pleasantly together for a long time, recounting

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

the ancient traditions to each other, they thus promoted their mutual delight.

O Prince of the House of Raghu, when King Vishwamitra paused, Shri Vasishtha said to him smilingly : “ O King, although thou hast with thee a large retinue, yet it is my desire to offer thee hospitality, together with thine army. Be pleased to accept it. Since thou art a distinguished guest, it is meet that I should do all within my power to entertain thee, therefore, be gracious enough to receive the little I have to offer.”

King Vishwamitra answered : “ O Lord, thy gentle and pleasing words are sufficient entertainment. Moreover, thou hast already presented me with fruits and the clear water of thy hermitage. By meeting with thee alone, am I sufficiently honoured. O Supremely Wise One, it was proper that I should offer obeisance to thee ; now thou hast entertained me, allow me to offer thee salutations and depart.”

The great sage declined to accept the king's refusal of his offer, and still insisted that he should entertain him.

Then Vishwamitra said : “ Be it according to thy pleasure, my Lord, I will do as thou desirest.”

At these words, Shri Vasishtha sent for his favourite spotted cow Kamadhenu and said to her : “ O Shabala, draw near and listen to me, I desire to offer hospitality to the king and his army. O Dear One, thou art the wish-fulfilling cow and can accomplish anything, therefore, now prepare splendid dishes which will be pleasing to them, of the six kinds of taste.¹ Produce speedily whatever food can be eaten, drunk, licked or sucked.”

CHAPTER 53

The king desires to possess Shabala but Shri Vasishtha will not give her up

THE cow Shabala provided for the needs of all according to the instruction of Shri Vasishtha. Sugar cane, sweets of various kinds, honey, crushed barley, wine and other excellent drinks,

¹ The six kinds of taste : sweet, bitter, acid, salt, pungent and acrid.

BALA KANDA

hot rice in heaps as high as mountains, milk, curry and other fare combining the six tastes and countless other dishes with sweets made of jagari¹ were distributed. Each was wholly satisfied and delighted with the hospitality of Shri Vasishtha, who accorded to all the companions and retainers of King Vishwamitra the full extent of their desires.

The king with his family priests, ministers and attendants, partaking of the feast offered with generosity and respect by the great sage, was highly gratified.

When all the counsellors and personal attendants and the army had received full hospitality, the king, wholly satisfied, said to Shri Vasishtha: "O Holy Sage, thou hast entertained me royally, please hear what I have to say O Eloquent One! O Lord, give me the cow Shabala in exchange for a hundred thousand excellent cows. Shabala is a jewel and by a king should jewels be enjoyed—according to the natural law, this treasure should therefore be mine."

Shri Vasishtha answered, saying: "O King, I will not part with Shabala in exchange for ten million cows, still less for a hundred thousand. If thou did'st offer me mountains of silver yet would I refuse to give thee Shabala for she must remain in my hermitage.

"O King, as a righteous man cares for his good name, so do I for Shabala. She helps me to satisfy the devas, the pitris and other beings. My sacred fire sacrifice and other Vedic rites, besides the various branches of learning depend on Shabala. O Great Ruler, indeed I cannot relinquish this cow, she is my all and she fulfils all my needs—for these and numerous other reasons do I refuse to yield the cow to thee. O King, verily I will not part with Shabala."

The words of Shri Vasishtha merely increased the king's desire and he, under great emotion, declared with passion: "O Great Muni, I will give thee fourteen thousand elephants adorned with golden trappings, ornaments and goads and, in addition, I will give thee a hundred and eight chariots made of solid gold, each driven by four milk white horses. At the same time, I offer thee eleven thousand well-trained horses, each with a golden harness and further ten million cows of

¹ Jagari—coarse brown Indian sugar made from palm sap.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

varied colours, that are young and healthy. O give me Shabala, and I will give thee in exchange as much gold as thou desirest. Grant me Shabala, I implore thee, and accept my gifts, O Sage."

Then the wise Vasishtha said : " Under no condition can I part with Shabala, O King, she is my jewel and my wealth. She is my very life, my all-in-all, and she furnishes me with alms and all I require for sacrifice. In brief, O King, Shabala is the source of my spiritual life and I will never give her up."

CHAPTER 54

King Vishwamitra attempts to carry her away by force

O RAMA, perceiving that Shri Vasishtha would not willingly consent to part with the cow, Vishwamitra resolved to carry her away by force.

O Raghava, while Shabala was being forcibly carried off, distracted with grief, she began to reflect thus : " Why has the holy Vasishtha abandoned me ? In what way have I offended the holy sage ? Why are the servants of the king dragging me away from the hermitage ? I am innocent and docile, the holy muni is dear to me ; what fault have I committed that the Mahatma Vasishtha should abandon me ? "

Sighing again and again, Shabala, shaking off the hands of the king's attendants, swiftly ran and placed her head at the feet of the holy sage. Standing before Shri Vasishtha, shedding tears and lamenting loudly, she cried : " O Lord, O Son of Brahma hast thou verily abandoned me ? Why are the servants of the king taking me away from thy presence, by force ? "

Seeing the sorely stricken Shabala, Shri Vasishtha addressed her as he would his own sister, saying : " O Shabala, it is not by my will that thou art thus being carried away, neither hast thou offended me in any way, O Dear One. Drunk with desire, the king is taking thee from me by force. I have not the power to defend thee. The king is a warrior and lord of the earth, he is attended by a mighty army with horses, elephants and chariots, verily he is mightier than I."

BALA KANDA

Shabala, who was skilled in argument, listened to the words of Shri Vasishtha and said : “ O Holy Sage, the power of a warrior is as nought compared to that of a holy sage. O Illustrious Lord, the strength of a sage is divine and based on the exercise of spiritual practices and discipline, it is therefore limitless ; thou art, O Lord, immeasurably stronger than a kshatriya. The power of that mighty king Vishwamitra, is great, but he cannot equal thy strength and splendour. O Lord, through thy strength and energy suffer me to destroy the power and pride of this wicked wretch.”

Shri Vasishtha answered : “ Be it so ! Create an army by thy spiritual energy, that will destroy the forces of the king.”

Lowling loudly, Shabala, in obedience to the sage, instantly produced hundreds of foreign soldiers, who began to destroy the army of Vishwamitra while he was looking on. Perceiving his army about to be overthrown, King Vishwamitra became enraged and, mounting his chariot, his eyes red with anger, he advanced to the attack. With various weapons, he began to slay thousands of men, and Shabala, seeing the army created by her, annihilated, now produced strange beings called shakas in such numbers, that they filled the whole earth. Highly valorous, their skins shining like gold, clad in yellow armour, furnished with scimitars and maces, they started to consume the army of Vishwamitra like a raging fire.

Then the great Vishwamitra, with the aid of yogic weapons, began to create disorder in the ranks of the forces produced by Shabala.

CHAPTER 55

Shabala creates an army which annihilates Vishwamitra's forces

As the mighty warriors fell, pierced by the weapons of Vishwamitra's forces, Shri Vasishtha said to Shabala : “ O Shabala, create more warriors by the power of Yoga.”

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Shabala, lowing loudly, produced well-armed soldiers from her feet and udders, and from her hair and thighs were born the extraordinary warriors Harita and Kirata. By these, the whole army of Vishwamitra consisting of elephants, horses and chariots, was instantly destroyed. Beholding their entire army exterminated by the power of Shri Vasishtha, King Vishwamitra's hundred sons bearing mighty arms and with various thought-propelled weapons rushed angrily at the holy Sage Vasishtha. Shri Vasishtha merely uttered the sound "H'm!" and they were all immediately consumed. By the great Sage Vasishtha, the infantry, cavalry and chariots, together with the sons of King Vishwamitra, were instantly burned to ashes.

Then the illustrious monarch Vishwamitra whose sons and army had been annihilated, was filled with shame and dismay. Deprived of his glory, he resembled a waveless ocean or a snake bereft of its fangs or the sun under eclipse. Like a bird without wings, his confidence shattered, his pride humbled, he became filled with anxiety. Bestowing the kingdom on his only remaining son, he exhorted him to rule according to dharma and then himself retired to the forest to practise asceticism.

After some time, he found favour with Shri Mahadeva¹ the magnanimous granter of boons, and he, appearing before Vishwamitra, addressed him saying: "O King, why art thou undergoing penance? What is thy desire? I will grant thee whatsoever thou asketh?"

Shri Vishwamitra making obeisance to Shri Mahadeva said to him: "O Great God, if I have found favour with thee, then instruct me in the Upanishads and other branches of learning, teach me also the mysteries and the science of archery. Whatever weapons are known to the danavas, yakshas, asuras and other beings, let them be revealed to me by thy grace."

On hearing the request of the king, Shri Shiva answered, "Be it so" and returned to his abode.

King Vishwamitra, having acquired the various weapons from Mahadeva, became as happy as the sea at the time of the full moon. He now resolved to subdue the Sage Vasishtha and regarded him as his captive already.

Proceeding to his hermitage he discharged his great weapons

¹ Mahadeva—Great God, a name of Shiva.

BALA KANDA

like rain, setting the forest of Tapovan ablaze. Afflicted by these dreadful weapons, all the sages began to flee to the four quarters in terror ; even the disciples of Shri Vasishtha, together with innumerable birds and beasts, escaped hastily in every direction. The hermitage of Shri Vasishtha became deserted and a deep silence fell upon it, causing it to resemble a barren field.

Shri Vasishtha repeatedly called out : “ Fear not, fear not, I will destroy Vishwamitra as the sun dispels the morning mist.”

Then the great Sage Vasishtha, foremost among those who practise silent prayer, angrily addressed Vishwamitra saying : “ Thou hast destroyed my ancient and auspicious hermitage, O Wicked and Deluded Wretch, thou thyself shalt be destroyed.”

Snatching up his staff equal to the rod of Yama, he advanced like a naked flame.

CHAPTER 56

*Shri Vasishtha by his spiritual strength conquers Vishwamitra
who then engages in penances*

HEARING the harsh words uttered by Shri Vasishtha, Vishwamitra raising the fire weapon, cried : “ Stay ! Beware ! ”

Then Shri Vasishtha, lifting up his Brahma staff in wrath, exclaimed : “ O Vilest of Warriors, here I stand, let loose all thy weapons, not excepting those propelled by thought which thou hast obtained from the Lord Shiva. O Son of Gadhi, to-day I will deprive thee of all these weapons. How can thy power as a warrior compare with that of a divine sage ? O Stupid Wretch, behold my divine energy ! ”

So saying, Shri Vasishtha quenched the dangerous fire weapon hurled at him by Vishwamitra as water quenches fire.

Then the son of Gadhi let fly other dangerous weapons upon the holy sage, the Varuna, the Rudra, the Indra, the Pashupata and Ishika weapons together with the Manava, Mohana, Gandharva, Swapana, Jrimbhana, Viadana, Santapana,

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

and Vilapana ; the Shoshana, Darana and the terrible Vatra ; the Brahma-pasha and Kalapasha, the Varuna-pasha and the priceless Pinaka and also the missiles Shushka and Ardra, the Danda weapon and the Pisacha, the Krouncha and the Dharma-discus, the Kala discus and the discus of Vishnu, also the weapon Vayuvya, Mathana and Haya-shira did he discharge upon the great sage with the two Shaktis, the Kankala, Mushala, Vidyadhara, Kala, the trident Kapala and the Kankana. All these did he hurl at the holy sage.

Then Shri Vasishtha accomplished a great marvel and by means of his staff alone destroyed all the weapons of Vishwamitra. Seeing these weapons rendered ineffectual, Vishwamitra raised the Brahman-astra. At this, Agni, the divine sages and the celestial beings were seized with terror and the three worlds shook with fear. But by means of his spiritual power and the study and practice of Brahman-Vidya, Shri Vasishtha subdued the Brahman-astra. As Shri Vasishtha consumed this tremendous weapon, his charming and pleasing mien became terrible and from each pore of his body shafts of light shot forth while the staff of the holy sage, shining like fire, burst into flame.

All the sages now began to praise Shri Vasishtha, saying : " Thy power is without equal and ever productive of good, by the power of thy Yoga, pacify the Brahman-astra. O Holy Sage, thou hast humbled the pride of Vishwamitra. O Great Ascetic, be pacified, that we also may be delivered from fear."

Thus addressed, Shri Vasishtha assumed his accustomed mien and Vishwamitra, being defeated, sighing heavily, exclaimed : " Woe, woe to the might of a warrior ! The real power is the spiritual power. Shri Vasishtha by his spiritual strength has fully conquered mine. I will, therefore, abandon my warlike nature and seek to obtain brahmanhood."

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER 57

*Shri Vasishtha refuses to help King Trishanku enter heaven
in his physical state*

THE heart of Vishwamitra was heavy, remembering his disgrace, and he was filled with remorse at having borne enmity to Shri Vasishtha.

O Rama, with his queen he went to the southern quarter and began his great ascetic penance there.

After a long time four sons were born to him, each a devotee of truth, who were virtuous and of great military prowess. Their names were Havisyanda, Madhusyanda, Drirha-netra and Maharatha.

Having practised severe austerities for a thousand years, the Grandsire of the world, Shri Brahma appeared before Vishwamitra and said : " O Son of Kaushika, thou hast surpassed the royal sages in thy great asceticism, thou shalt, therefore, be numbered among them." Having thus spoken, Shri Brahma with the gods went to Brahmaloka.

Vishwamitra was filled with shame and with bowed head, overcome with grief, thus spoke : " Alas ! In spite of prolonged austerities, the gods still hold me to be a royal sage.¹ I deem this state no reward for the penance I have undergone."

O Rama, with renewed resolve, Vishwamitra, pre-eminent in the field of endeavour began his life of mortification anew.

At this time, the great King Trishanku of the House of Ikswaku, fully self-subdued and a lover of truth, resolved to initiate a sacrifice in order to enter heaven in his physical body. Summoning the holy Sage Vasishtha, he communicated his intention to him, but the Mahatma Vasishtha, having duly considered the matter, said : " O King, this cannot be."

Discouraged by Shri Vasishtha and for the purpose of fulfilling his design, the monarch went southwards to where the sons of Shri Vasishtha abode, leading lives of purity and ascetism. When King Trishanku beheld the sons of his own Guru, that great and illustrious sage, he was full of shame, and with bowed

¹ See note on page 102.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

head offered salutation to them, addressing them in great humility saying, "O Protectors of those who seek refuge in you, I come to seek your aid. O Holy Ones, I besought your sire to assist me in the observance of a sacrifice and he discouraged me. I have, therefore, come to seek your help in the matter. O Sons of my Holy Guru, I offer salutations to you. Again and again, I bow down to you, O Holy Ones, and beseech you to officiate at the proposed sacrifice, which I desire to undertake for the fulfilment of my design, namely that I may ascend to heaven in my embodied state. Discouraged by the holy teacher Vasishtha, I consider that you alone are able to assist me. Should you refuse me, there is none in whom I may take refuge. The kings of the House of Ikshwaku have always sought guidance of their spiritual preceptor in time of need, and the holy and learned Sage Vasishtha has ever upheld the dynasty and, following him, you alone are my instructors".

CHAPTER 58

The king appeals to Shri Vasishtha's sons to conduct the sacrifice. They curse him and he appeals to Vishwamitra

O RAMA, hearing the words of the king, the hundred sons of Shri Vasishtha were filled with wrath and said : "O Thou Evil-minded Wretch, discouraged by thy spiritual preceptor, how dost thou dare to seek our aid? O King, we know thee to be an ignorant man. Shri Vasishtha is able to advance the sacrifices of the three worlds, verily thou art no true disciple of such a sage. Shall we render void the utterance of our great sire?"

Hearing these harsh words, the king replied : "Discouraged by my Guru and now by you, I shall seek elsewhere for aid; may all be well with you."

The sons of the great sage were enraged on hearing these words spoken in defiance, and cursed the king, saying : "Mayest

thou become one of the fallen caste." Having thus cursed him, they returned to their hermitage.

When the night was over, the king was transformed into a low-born being, his complexion dark, his body emaciated, his head shaven, his whole frame besmeared with ashes from the crematorium, his golden ornaments changed to lead.

When the people of the capital beheld the king in this condition they fled from that place, and Trishanku departed, full of anguish. Sunk in grief day and night, he finally sought refuge with Shri Vishwamitra. That sage seeing the monarch deprived of his kingdom and condemned to assume the form of a low-caste being, was moved with compassion, and addressed him saying : "O Mighty Prince, mayest thou be prosperous ! Why hast thou come hither ? I know thee to be the Sovereign of Ayodhya that through a curse art come to this state."

The eloquent King Trishanku, with joined palms, replied in tones of submission : "O Great One, discouraged by my Guru and his sons in my desire to enter heaven in the physical body, I have been transformed by them into a chandala.¹ Now, for shame, I may not show myself to any. O Lord, I have failed to obtain the fruit of countless sacrifices, an untruth has never been uttered by me, I have governed my people with righteousness and by my conduct have satisfied my spiritual preceptor and holy men. I desired to undertake a further meritorious sacrifice, but O Great Sage, my Guru has withheld his aid. O Lord, destiny is irrevocable, destiny is inexorable, none can withstand it. All are ruled by destiny. O Divine Sage, be favourable to me, who am fallen into distress ! Besides thee, there is none in whom I can take refuge. O Holy One, by thy spiritual energy, avert this evil fate."

¹ Chandala—an outcast.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

CHAPTER 59

*Vishwamitra seeks the help of the sons of Vasishtha
and Mahodeva ; they refuse and are cursed*

SHRI VISHWAMITRA heard the appeal of the fallen sovereign and in sweet accents spoke words of comfort, saying : " O King, thou art welcome, I know thee to be wholly virtuous, I will be thy refuge, fear not. I shall invite hither the learned and pious brahmans who will assist thee in the performance of thy sacrifice. This thou shalt accomplish and obtain heaven in the form imposed on thee by thy Guru. O King, having taken refuge in me, consider thy purpose already accomplished."

Having uttered these words, Shri Vishwamitra commanded his sons to prepare all things for the sacrifice. Summoning his disciples, he said to them : " Bring hither the pious and learned brahmans and the sons of Shri Vasishtha also. May they come with their disciples, their friends, the learned and the priests. If any disregard my word, let it be reported to me."

In obedience to the sage, the disciples set out to every quarter, summoning the sages and learned men from many lands. Returning, they approached Vishwamitra, and said : " O Lord, at thy command the holy sages are coming hither, some are already come, Mahodeva excepted ; but the sons of holy Vasishtha, transported with rage uttered harsh words of which we will tell thee." They said : " How shall divine sages partake of that sacrifice undertaken by a chandala, at which a kshatriya officiates ? And how shall those brahmans, constrained by Vishwamitra, partaking of the food offered by a chandala, enter heaven ? "

O Great Sage, these are the words of the sons of Shri Vasishtha.

Vishwamitra, his eyes red with anger, answered : " Why should the sons of Shri Vasishtha disregard me, who am engaged in severe ascetic practices and without guilt ? By my power, these evil-minded men shall this day be consumed to ashes and enter the abode of death. By my curse they shall become

BALA KANDA

of those who subsist on the dead for a hundred incarnations. They shall eat the flesh of dogs and be called 'Musthika'. Despised by all, they shall wander about among men and may the wicked Mahodeva also, having imputed blame to me, be born as a fowler, for a long time becoming the pitiless destroyer of other's lives and by my wrath may he sink to a miserable and abject state."

Sitting amid the sages, the Sage Vishwamitra having pronounced this curse, became silent.

CHAPTER 60

Through fear of Vishwamitra, the sages assist in the sacrifice and King Trishanku ascends to a specially created heaven

HAVING stricken the sons of Shri Vasishtha by the power of his asceticism, Vishwamitra, seated amidst the sages, spoke :—

"The renowned monarch Trishanku of the dynasty of Ikshwaku, who is both magnanimous and virtuous, has taken refuge with me. He is desirous of entering heaven in his embodied state, it is for me to accomplish it. O Sages, do you unitedly assist him in this sacrifice."

The sages hearing the words of Vishwamitra and being acquainted with the tradition, consulted together saying : "The son of Kaushika, the Rishi Vishwamitra, is given to wrath. If we do not fulfil his desire, like a consuming fire he will pour out his curse upon us. Let us, therefore, assist him in the sacrifice so that the king may enter heaven in his physical body. Now let us inaugurate the rites."

Then the rites began, as prescribed by ancient tradition, Vishwamitra acting as the chief priest and the learned brahmins becoming the sacrificing priests subordinate to him. Observing numerous rituals, the sacrifice continued for a long time. Then Shri Vishwamitra called thither the gods for their share of the sacrifice, but none of these celestial beings appeared. At this

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

the great sage grew exceedingly wroth and lifting up the sacrificial vessel, said to the King Trishanku : " O King, behold the power of my asceticism by virtue of which I now send thee to heaven in thy embodied state. O King, though it is deemed impossible to accomplish this, by the power acquired by me I now say to thee ; ' ascend to heaven in thy physical form.' "

Having uttered these words, King Trishanku, in the presence of the sages instantly ascended to the heavens.

Seeing Trishanku there, Indra and all the other gods exclaimed : " O Trishanku, thou hast no place in heaven. Cursed by thy Guru, O Stupid Wretch, do thou fall headlong to the earth."

Trishanku accordingly instantly began to fall towards the earth crying out to Shri Vishwamitra, " Protect me ", " Protect me ".

Shri Vishwamitra, hearing the cry, grew angry, and called out, " Stay, Stay ". At that moment, standing amidst the sages, the great rishi resembled Prajapati. Thereafter he created seven planets in the southern quarter called the Seven Rishis, and then he created the Ashwini and twenty-seven other stars. Seated amidst the sages, filled with wrath, Vishwamitra reflected in himself : " I will create another Indra or I will leave this heaven without an Indra. Nay, I will make Trishanku Lord of this heaven," and he began to create a new circle of gods.

Upon this, the sages, gods and celestial beings, bewildered and perturbed, approached Vishwamitra and said with humility : " O Great Sage, this king has been cursed by his spiritual preceptor and is not worthy of heaven."

Shri Vishwamitra answered them, saying : " Hear, O ye Gods, I have vowed that this king should enter heaven in his embodied state, this pledge must be fulfilled. To this end, I have created the Pole star and other planets and this heaven will abide as long as the former heaven endures, as also the gods created by me, it becomes you, therefore, to confirm what I have promised."

The gods in awe, having heard these words, answered : " Be it so, O Illustrious Rishi, the heaven created by thee shall endure beyond the Path of Vishwanara, and let Trishanku, suspended head downwards, remain as if immortal among these shining

BALA KANDA

stars. As the stars attend on famous and successful men, so let these brilliant luminaries, created by thee, attend on King Trishanku."

Shri Vishwamitra, extolled by the gods, acquiesced in their proposal.

After this, O Rama, the gods and the ascetics who had attended the sacrifice, returned to their own regions.

CHAPTER 6 I

*King Ambarisha's sacrificial horse is lost and he seeks
a human victim*

O RAMA, when Vishwamitra saw the sages departing, he said to the dwellers of the Tapovana forest : " In the southern region, great obstructions have hindered my penances, I shall therefore go to another quarter to perform austerity. To the west of this place, at the sacred spot named Pushkara, there is a large and beautiful forest where I shall continue my practices undisturbed."

Reaching that place, the great sage engaging in occult practices, subsisted on fruit and roots.

Meanwhile, King Ambarisha of Ayodhya inaugurated the horse sacrifice, but the horse was carried away by Indra, on which the priest addressed the monarch, saying : " O King, it is for thee to protect the sacrificial steed, the horse has been stolen away owing to thy negligence, therefore, provide another or seek a human victim, so that the sacrifice may be accomplished without further hindrance."

Hearing these words, the renowned monarch offered thousands of cows to whosoever should find either a horse, or human being. Seeking the sacrificial beast, the illustrious sovereign passed through many countries, cities and forests, and entered hermitages and sacred places.

At length, the King Ambarisha beheld Richika the Sage, with his sons and wife dwelling on the mountain Bhrgutunga.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Making obeisance to him, the king honoured him in various ways and enquired as to his welfare. He then said to him : " If it be agreeable to thee, grant me one of thy sons in exchange for a hundred thousand cows. After searching many countries, I have not found either a horse or a human victim for the sacrifice. O Lord, do thou, therefore, deliver thy son to me and accede to my request."

Richika answered : " O King, I will never bestow my eldest son on any." His wife then said : " My Lord does not wish to part with the eldest son, but the youngest son Shunaka is dearest to me, I shall not part with him. O Great Muni, the eldest son is beloved of his father and the youngest is dear to his mother, therefore, these two should not be taken away."

O Rama, the middle son, whose name was Shunashepha, hearing these words, spoke thus : " My father does not wish to part with his eldest son, nor my mother with her youngest, therefore, take me, O King."

O Rama, the king gave the Sage Richika a hundred thousand cows in exchange for Shunashepha and, mounting his chariot, started with him on his homeward journey.

CHAPTER 62

*Shunashepha, the human victim, seeks and obtains help
from Vishwamitra*

O RAMA, the illustrious King Ambarisha, accompanied by Shunashepha, having in the afternoon reached Pushkara, rested there. While the king rested, Shunashepha, going to a certain spot, beheld Shri Vishwamitra, his maternal uncle, engaged with other sages in the performance of spiritual practices and he, sorrowful, thirsty and fatigued, fell at the feet of the sage, and said : " O Lord, for me there is neither father, mother, relative nor caste. O Peaceful Sage, O Sovereign among ascetics, I take refuge in thee ; in the name of dharma, deliver me. Thou can'st protect the whole world, how much more one so insignifi-

BALA KANDA

cant as myself. Do thou assist the king in the completion of his sacrifice that it may be accomplished without hindrance, and may I live and by means of my spiritual practices obtain heaven. Thou art my master who am masterless. Protect me, wretched as I am, as a father protects his child."

Shri Vishwamitra, hearing the piteous words of Shunashepha addressed his own sons, saying: "O My Sons, that world for which fathers beget their children is at hand,¹ this child is the son of the Sage Richika and has taken refuge in me, let us protect his life. You are all virtuous and charitable, let one of you take the place of the sacrificial victim at the king's sacrifice, and thus satisfy the God Agni. In this way, we can rescue Shunashepha. Assist me in the completion of the king's sacrifice, propitiate the gods, and enable me to be true to my word."

Hearing these words, Madhusyanda and the other sons sullenly replied to Vishwamitra, saying: "O King of Kings, would'st thou abandon thine own sons and protect another's? Such an action resembles the relinquishing of a tasty dish to partake of the flesh of a dog."

Hearing this reply, Shri Vishwamitra grew angry and, his eyes inflamed with wrath, he said: "Your speech is arrogant and contrary to dharma, it is a violation of filial affection. I regard you all as insubordinate, therefore, I now curse you. Like the sons of Shri Vasishta, may you fall from your high caste and, eating the flesh of dogs, wander about in the world during the period of a thousand years!"

Having thus cursed his sons, the muni, offering Shunashepha his protection, thus instructed him: "O Son of a Sage, at King Ambarisha's sacrifice, allow thyself to be bound, adorned with the red garland, besmeared with sandalwood paste and tied to the sacrificial post. I will impart to thee two mantrams, which when repeated, will deliver thee."

The holy sage then carefully instructed him in the sacred formulas. Thereafter, Shunashepha approached the king and said: "O Illustrious Monarch, now enter upon the initiation without delay and accomplish the performance of thy sacrifice."

¹ The Hindus regard their hope of a future existence to depend to a great extent on their sons performing their obsequies.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

The king, filled with joy, went without delay to the sacrificial pavilion. With the consent of the officiating priest, the king now dressed Shunashepha in red attire and tied him to the post as the consecrated victim. Being bound, Shunashepha began to praise Upendra¹ by reciting the mantrams he had been given by Vishwamitra.

Indra, pleased with the worship of Shunashepha, bestowed the blessing of long life on him.

O Rama, then did the king complete his sacrifice and obtain the desired fruit from Indra.

Thereafter, the righteous Vishwamitra renewed his yogic penance in Pushkara and performed it there for a thousand years.

CHAPTER 63

*After more austerities Vishwamitra is proclaimed
a Maharishi*

SHRI VISHWAMITRA passed a thousand years in the practice of mortification, then the gods came to bestow on him the fruits of his asceticism. The supreme Brahma addressed him in pleasing accents, saying: "O Holy One, mayest thou be prosperous, thou art now become a rishi by virtue of thy great austerities." Having said this, Shri Brahma and the other celestial beings returned to their own spheres.

Vishwamitra again engaged in severe austerity and in this way passed many more years. While thus employed, the celestial nymph Menaka came to bathe in the Pushkara lake. Resembling lightning illumining a cloud, her beauty stirred the passion of Vishwamitra and he said to her :—

"Be gracious to me for I am filled with a great love for thee."

Then that beautiful one agreed to take up her abode in the hermitage of the rishi. The penances of Vishwamitra were thus rendered void by the presence of Menaka in the hermitage. O Rama, that nymph passed ten years in that place.

¹ Upendra—a name of Indra.

BALA KANDA

After this time, Shri Vishwamitra perceiving himself to have been deluded, was filled with shame and he reflected on the cause of his infatuation. Then he adjudged the gods to have devised this plan to bring his ascetism to nought and he cried out : "What, have I passed ten years with this woman, as it were a night. Alas ! My great austerities are destroyed by this passion."

Sighing heavily and filled with remorse, he beheld Menaka trembling with fear, standing near, but Vishwamitra addressing her in reassuring words, bade her farewell.

Having controlled his passions, Shri Vishwamitra went to the northern mountains and began to perform penance in the Himalayas on the bank of the Kaushiki river.

Then, O Rama, the gods were filled with fear by the austerities practised by the rishi on the Himalayan mountains, and approaching Shri Brahma said :—

"O Grandsire, now grant the title of maharishi to Shri Vishwamitra."

Shri Brahma then appeared before Vishwamitra and in gentle accents said to him : "Hail to Thee, O Rishi, I am pleased with thine austerity. I name thee chief among the rishis."

Then Vishwamitra, making obeisance to Shri Brahma, spoke submissively saying : "O Lord, these penances have been undertaken by me that I might become a brahmarishi. Since thou still namest me maharishi, I regard myself as not yet fully self-subdued."

Shri Brahma answered, saying : "So it is, thou hast not yet fully gained the mastery over thy senses. O Great Muni, undergo further penance." Having uttered these words, Shri Brahma returned to the celestial regions.

Then Vishwamitra began an exceedingly severe penance, standing unsupported with his arms raised, living only on air ; in the summer season, standing in the midst of five fires, in the rainy season lying without a canopy, in the winter practising his spiritual discipline in water, thus did he pass a thousand years.

Perceiving Vishwamitra undergoing these severe penances, the gods were greatly perturbed. At length their lord, Indra,

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

approached the nymph Rambha and begged her to promote his interest and cause harm to Vishwamitra.

CHAPTER 64

Indra is perturbed and sends Rambha to disturb the further austerities of the Sage

INDRA thus addressed Rambha saying : “ O Rambha, it is for thee to accomplish this great work and stimulate the passions of the great Sage Vishwamitra, so that his spiritual practices may be rendered void.”

O Rama, Rambha, filled with apprehension on hearing the words of Indra, said in humility : “ O Indra, the Rishi Vishwamitra is easily moved to wrath, he will certainly curse me if I approach him. I fear to enter his presence, do not therefore ask me to undertake this task.”

To Rambha, trembling with fear, standing with joined palms, in token of submission, Indra made answer : “ O Rambha, fear not, accomplish my desire, may success attend thee !

In the spring season, assuming the form of a cuckoo calling sweetly, accompanied by the god of love, I will take my place on a blossoming tree not far from thee. O Rambha, attired in beautiful and charming apparel do thou divert the mind of the muni from his spiritual practices.”

At the instance of Indra, that lovely nymph clad in enchanting raiment, faintly smiling, went forth to allure the heart of Shri Vishwamitra.

At that moment, the liquid notes of the cuckoo began to delight the rishi and he then beheld the nymph Rambha. Stirred by the cuckoo's note and the ravishing sound of the beautiful Rambha's song, Shri Vishwamitra, recollecting his former fall, was filled with misgiving and recognizing the design of the god Indra, transported with rage, cursed Rambha, saying :—

“ O Rambha, O Unfortunate One, thou hast come hither

BALA KANDA

to lure me from my penance, I, who have conquered lust and anger. Mayest thou become petrified and take the form of a rock for ten thousand years. A brahmin perfected in the power of Yoga shall one day deliver thee from this curse."

Having pronounced this curse on Rambha, the rishi became a prey to remorse, for, giving way to wrath he lost the fruit of all his yogic practices.

Rambha having been instantly turned to stone, Indra and Kama, perceiving the sage filled with wrath, fled in terror.

Shri Vishwamitra having lost the merit of his penances could obtain no peace ; his passions remaining unsubdued, he resolved to speak no word to any and never give way to anger ; he said : " For a thousand years, I will not breathe. Reducing my body to the last extremity, mastering my senses, I will obtain brahmanhood by the power of my penance. Measureless years, shall I remain standing, neither breathing nor eating, even should my limbs become atrophied."

O Rama, Vishwamitra resolved to perform this mortification for the space of a thousand years.

CHAPTER 65

*Vishwamitra performs another thousand years' austerities
and he acquires brahmanhood*

AFTER this the great Rishi Vishwamitra, leaving the northern quarter, went eastward and engaged in a most severe course of austerities. Observing silence for a thousand years, he performed incomparable ascetic practices, hardly able to be accomplished.

After a thousand years, his form reduced to the semblance of wood, the royal sage, under the greatest provocation, was not incited to anger. O Rama, when Vishwamitra was persuaded that he had conquered anger, his vow of a thousand years' mortification being terminated, he sat down to eat.

At that time, Indra appeared in the guise of a brahmin and

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

requested the food set before the muni, upon which Vishwamitra, believing him to be a sage, gave him the whole which he had prepared for himself and still observing the vow of silence, uttered no word.

The chief of the sages, suspending his breath for a further thousand years, continued his penance, then there issued from his head a smoke which terrified the beings of the three worlds. By the power of his mortification, the devas, gandharvas, and other beings were deprived of their glory and lost consciousness.

In distress, they addressed Shri Brahma saying : " O Lord, by every means in our power, we have sought to distract the great sage from his penances and provoke him to anger, but he has persisted in his practices and is free from desire and aversion. If thou dost not grant him brahmanhood, verily the three worlds will be destroyed. None can find rest anywhere, the seas are drying up and the mountains are riven by the power of his austerities ; the sun is deprived of its splendour, the earth is agitated and the wind stirs not. O Lord, we cannot move him from his resolve. On account of this peril, men like atheists have given up the performance of charitable deeds. Nowhere is peace to be found. O Divine Being, lest the mighty Vishwamitra, resplendent as fire, determine to destroy the universe, deign to grant him his desire. As Time, in the form of fire, at the dissolution of the world, consumes the whole universe, so also will the Sage Vishwamitra. Grant him, therefore, Indrahood, if he so desire it, for if Thou withhold brahmanhood which he has sought to acquire, then only the sovereignty of Indra's region, will content him."

Thus approached, Shri Brahma, accompanied by the gods, appeared before Shri Vishwamitra and in pleasing accents addressed him, saying : " O Brahmarishi, reverence to thee, we are pleased with thine austerity. O Holy Vishwamitra, by the power of thy penance, thou hast acquired brahmanhood. The gods bless thee, may prosperity attend thee, may longevity be thine ! From to-day, thou art free, now go where thou pleaseth."

Offering salutations to Shri Brahma and all the gods, Shri Vishwamitra said : " Having bestowed brahmanhood and

BALA KANDA

longevity upon me, grant me instruction in the holy syllable 'AUM' and the Vedas also, and further invest me with the authority to officiate at the sacrifice. O Ye Gods, let the son of Brahma, Shri Vasishtha, fully acquainted with the Vedic science, acknowledge me as a brahmarishi. If this desire of mine be fulfilled, ye may all depart."

Thereupon the gods appeared before Shri Vasishtha, who having acquiesced in their wish and sealed his friendship with Vishwamitra, said to him: "Verily thou art now a brahmarishi and as such I acknowledge thee." Thereafter the gods returned to their own region. Thus did the illustrious Sage Vishwamitra acquire brahmanhood.

The divine sage then paid homage to the great Vasishtha and, his purpose accomplished, wandered about the earth engaged in charitable deeds. Shri Shatananda said: "O Rama, this is the story of Shri Vishwamitra and how he obtained brahmanhood. O Raghava, verily he is the chief of sages and the personification of Yoga. Constantly engaged in acts of virtue, he still performs rigorous penances."

Having uttered these words, Shri Shatananda became silent.

When this excellent sage had ended his narrative, King Janaka in the presence of Rama and Lakshmana humbly addressed Shri Vishwamitra saying: "O Chief of Sages, blessed am I, that thou art come with Shri Rama and Lakshmana to my sacrifice. O Muni, thou hast, by thy presence, done us great honour. O Brahmarishi, thou hast added to our renown. Shri Rama, my counsellors and I have heard the story of thy wonderful austerities and also of thine excellent qualities. O Great Sage, immense is thy power, unimaginable thy penances, incalculable thy virtues, nor does one ever tire of hearing of thy marvellous deeds. O Illustrious Lord, the sun has set and the time of evening devotion is near, graciously grant us leave to depart; in the morning we shall see thee again."

Shri Vishwamitra gratified by the king's words, praised him and granted him permission to depart, upon which King Janaka rose and circumambulating the great sage took his departure, accompanied by his spiritual preceptor and relatives.

Honoured by the sages, the great Vishwamitra with Shri Rama and Lakshmana also returned to his abode.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

CHAPTER 66

King Janaka relates the story of the great bow and the birth of Sita

THE day dawned peacefully and King Janaka, having performed his morning devotions, called for the two princes and Vishwamitra. Having honoured the sage and the two descendants of the House of Raghu, he said : " O Blessed Lord, peace be with thee, what service can I render thee, I am wholly thine."

Thus addressed by the king, the Sage replied : " These two princes are the sons of King Dasaratha, they are renowned in the warrior caste and exalted throughout the earth. They desire to see the great bow, which is deposited with thee, be gracious enough to permit them to view it and having thus accomplished their purpose, they will return to their own capital."

Thus addressed, King Janaka replied to the sage : " O Holy Rishi, hear from me for what reason this bow is deposited with me. There was a king named Devarata in the sixth generation of the monarch Nimi who obtained this bow as a trust. In ancient days, Shri Mahadeva at the destruction of Daksha's¹ sacrifice, lifting up his bow in sport said to the gods : ' O Devas, ye have failed to give me my share in the sacrifice, therefore, by means of this bow I shall destroy you all.'

" O Great Sage, the devas overwhelmed with fear, making supplication to the god, succeeded in propitiating Shri Mahadeva. Then he delivered the bow to the gods and they bestowed it on King Devarata. This is the bow.

" Thereafter, while I was ploughing the earth for a sacrifice, a virgin issued therefrom. Being uncovered by the edge of the plough, I named her Sita² and she became my daughter. This earth-born virgin has grown up under my protection. For the marriage of my daughter, it was established by me and made known to the kings coming to seek her hand, that I should not bestow her on any prince whose strength had not been fully tried. O Renowned Sage, these kings have come to test

¹ Daksha—the father of Parvati, the son of Brahma, one of the Prajapatis

² Sita—literally a furrow.

BALA KANDA

their prowess and I have placed the bow before them and requested them to string it, but none as yet has been able to do so. Perceiving them to be deficient in strength, I have refused to bestow my daughter on any of them. These kings, inflamed with anger, considering their failure to string the bow had brought them into disrepute, surrounded my capital, and inflicted great hardship on my people. This siege endured a full year and immeasurably reduced my treasury. Undergoing severe penances, I propitiated the gods, who granted me a large army with which I have defeated those kings who have retreated, bereft of courage, yet still smarting under imagined injury.

“O Great Sage, this is that bow and I will show it to these two princes. O Rishi, should Shri Ramachandra be able to string the bow, I will give my daughter Sita to him in marriage.”

CHAPTER 67

The illustrious Rama breaks the bow and is given the Princess Sita in marriage

HEARING the words of King Janaka, Shri Vishwamitra said :—

“O King, let the bow be shown to Shri Rama.”

Then the monarch addressed his ministers, saying : “Go, bring the bow adorned with flowers and sandalwood, hither.”

The counsellors commanded by Janaka went to the capital and brought back the bow. Five hundred men, of great strength, brought the eight-wheeled cart on which the bow was placed. Having brought the chest fashioned of iron containing the bow, the ministers addressed their divine sovereign, saying : “O Chief of Men, here is the bow worshipped by former kings. O Sovereign of Mithila, it is at thy disposal.”

Then, with palms joined in humility, King Janaka spoke to the holy Sage Vishwamitra standing with Rama and Lakshmana : “O Holy Lord, this is the bow which has been the object of worship to the kings of the Nimi dynasty and which the monarchs

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

of the earth coming hither have sought to string. Even the gods have not been able to raise, bend or string this bow. How, therefore, should mortals have the power to do so if the gods have failed? O Great Rishi, behold the bow, let the two princes examine it."

The righteous Sage Vishwamitra, hearing the words of the king, said to Rama: "O Child, view this divine bow." Then Shri Rama, approaching the casket in which the bow lay, opened it and gazed upon it.

He said: "O Divine Lord, taking it in my hand and raising it up, I shall endeavour to string the bow." Then the king and the sage answered: "Be it so," and Shri Ramachandra with a slight effort, seizing the centre of the bow, lifted it up in the presence of thousands of people and without exertion drew it. By the unparalleled strength of the illustrious Rama, the bow broke into two parts and a sound resembling the fall of a thunderbolt rang forth cleaving the mountains asunder and causing the earth to shake, and on this the people on every side fell insensible, save only Vishwamitra, Rama and Lakshmana.

After a while, the people being somewhat restored, and the king's misgivings set at rest, he addressed the excellent Sage with humility, saying: "O Blessed Lord, I have witnessed the unparalleled, wonderful and incontestable feat of Shri Ramachandra. My daughter, the Princess Sita, shall obtain Prince Rama as her lord and add to the glory of my dynasty. O Great Sage, to-day my pledge to subject the prospective wooer of my daughter to a trial of strength has been redeemed. Now I shall bestow on Rama, Sita, who is dearer to me than my life. With thy permission, O Sage, my messengers in swift chariots shall drive in all haste to Ayodhya and respectfully relating this event to King Dasaratha invite him to my capital. They shall further inform him regarding the well-being of the two princes protected by thee and with due honour, convey the great king hither."

The Sage Vishwamitra acquiescing to the proposal, the king communicated the matter to his messengers and entrusting them with a personal missive to King Dasaratha, sent them forth on their deputation.

BALA KANDA

CHAPTER 68

*King Janaka sends messengers to invite King Dasaratha
to the capital*

COMMANDED by King Janaka, the messengers in swift chariots, passing three nights on the way, their horses greatly fatigued, arrived at Ayodhya. Entering the gates of the palace, they addressed the sentries, saying :—

“ Please inform the king that we have come from King Janaka and desire an audience.”

King Dasaratha being informed, caused the messengers to be brought before him. Entering the royal palace, they beheld the aged king who resembled a god. His benign and gracious presence putting them at their ease, they addressed him in gentle and submissive accents saying : “ O Illustrious Sovereign, the Lord of the kingdom of Mithila, the performer of great sacrifices, King Janaka, enquires with affection as to thy well-being and also concerning the welfare of thy subjects. With the consent of the Sage Vishwamitra he sends you the following good tidings. His daughter who has been wooed by many kings unable to pass the requisite trial of strength, who have thereupon returned home discomfited, has been won by thy highly fortunate and princely son. He, in the company of the Sage Vishwamitra, coming hither, broke the sacred bow in the presence of a great assembly, therefore, King Janaka desiring to see his daughter wedded to thy son, Shri Ramachandra, sends thee the following message : “ O Great Sovereign be gracious enough to visit my kingdom with all speed, together with thy preceptors, thy family and attendants and be united with thy sons. Accept the love I bear for thee. Do thou come hither and witness the nuptials of thy children.

“ O King, these are the words of King Janaka which we bring to thee approved by the Sage Vishwamitra and the priest Shri Shatananda.”

Having uttered these words, the messengers, overawed by the sovereign's presence, became silent.

On receiving these tidings, King Dasaratha full of joy, said

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

to the holy Sage Vasishtha, Shri Vamadeva and his ministers : " Protected by Shri Vishwamitra, Shri Ramachandra and Prince Lakshmana are now in the city of Mithila. The renowned Janaka has witnessed the prowess of Shri Ramachandra and desires to give his daughter in marriage to him. If this union is looked upon with favour by you, let us start for Mithila immediately, so that we may reach it with all speed."

The sages and ministers there present, answered : " It is well," whereupon the king, highly pleased, said : " Let us set out to-morrow."

King Dasaratha with his counsellors entertained King Janaka's messengers with great respect, and they passed the night there in comfort.

CHAPTER 69

King Dasaratha sets out with his spiritual preceptor, relations and ministers

THE night being over, King Dasaratha, glad in heart, accompanied by his spiritual preceptor and relations, summoned his chief minister, Sumantra, and said :—

" Let the officers of the treasury take with them wealth and jewels in abundance and precede us in good order. Let the four divisions of my army hold themselves in readiness and let chariots and palanquins be prepared. Let my commands be carried out with promptitude. Suffer Shri Vasishtha, Vamadeva, Javali, Kashyapa, Bhrgu, Markandeya and Katya-yana with other learned and holy men to lead the procession. Make ready the royal chariot, let there be no delay, King Janaka's messengers are eager to return."

Then the mighty King Dasaratha attended by the holy sages set out on the journey followed by his army. Passing four nights on the road, they entered the capital of King Janaka, who, having commanded the city to be decorated, advanced to pay honour to his royal guests. Approaching the aged

BALA KANDA

sovereign Dasaratha, King Janaka was filled with joy, and addressed him with cheerful words, saying : “ O Great King, I bid thee welcome, fortunate indeed am I that thou hast been gracious enough to honour me with thy presence. Now shalt thou have the felicity of looking on thy two sons. Twice blessed am I that Shri Vasishtha, attended by other learned sages, has come hither also, as it were Indra in the midst of the gods. Every impediment to the wedding ceremony has been withdrawn and this ancient dynasty, by the alliance with the House of Raghu, will acquire new lustre. O Illustrious Sovereign, to-morrow at the completion of the sacrifice, having consulted with the sages, be gracious enough to celebrate the nuptials.”

The eloquent monarch, Dasaratha, seated amidst the sages, answered : “ I have ever heard that those who receive charity are subject to the conferrer of that charity ! O Thou acquainted with virtue, it is ours to defer to thee in all things.”

Hearing the speech of the truthful sovereign, King Dasaratha, King Janaka was filled with astonishment.

All the sages then coming together, passed the night in converse, mutually delighting each other.

King Dasaratha, being united with his sons was filled with happiness and surrendered himself wholly to King Janaka's hospitality.

The magnanimous sovereign of Mithila, having completed the orders for the preparations of the wedding ceremony, retired to rest.

CHAPTER 70

The king with Vishwamitra and the princes are invited to King Janaka's court where Vishwamitra relates the descent of the dynasty

THE following day, King Janaka, having carried out the sacrifice with the assistance of the priests, said to Shri Shatananda :—

“ My younger brother, the virtuous and mighty Kushadwaja, resides in the city of Sankanshya, which is surrounded by a moat

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

and battlements, mounted by heavy batteries, the river Ikshu flowing at its side, and resembles the aerial chariot Pushpaka. I desire to see that Excellent One, who, with liberality, has assisted me in the act of sacrifice ; it is meet that he should attend the marriage ceremony."

Having spoken thus to Shri Shatananda, certain attendants standing near, were commanded by the king to set out thither. At his command, the messengers, like gods riding out on the behest of Indra, went forth on swift horses to bring back the royal guest.

Arriving at Sankanshya, and being received by the King Kushadwaja, they acquainted him with King Janaka's proposal. The great king acquiescing to his request, came to the capital of the sovereign of Mithila and beholding the virtuous great-souled Janaka, together with Shri Shatananda, bowed down to them in salutation.

Having occupied a royal seat in the assembly, the two illustrious brothers commanded their chief minister, Sudamana, saying : " O Chief of Counsellors, speedily approach the great sovereign, Dasaratha, of limitless glory, and bring that Excellent One to my court, together with the two princes and his ministers."

Sudamana, going to the encampment of King Dasaratha, and bowing down to him, said : " O Great Hero, O Lord of Ayodhya, the sovereign of Mithila humbly invites thee with thy spiritual preceptor, thy priests and thy two sons to his assembly."

Then King Dasaratha attended by his friends and kinsmen came to the place where King Janaka sat amidst the sages and ministers. And he, the wise and eloquent monarch addressed King Janaka, saying : " O Great King, it is known to thee that the chief priest of the House of Ikshwaku is Shri Vasishtha and my spokesman in all matters. Therefore, with the approval of Shri Vishwamitra he will relate the descent of our dynasty to thee."

Having spoken, Dasaratha became silent and Shri Vasishtha then addressed King Janaka and Shri Shatananda :—

" From Brahman, the Unmanifest, the Eternal and Imperishable Brahma came forth. From him was produced Maricha, Maricha begot Kashyapa ; Kashyapa begot Surya, Surya

BALA KANDA

begot Vivaswat, and Vivaswat begot Manu. Manu was the father of Ikswaku who was the first king of Ayodhya. The son of Ikswaku was Kukshi and his son was Vikukshi ; the illustrious Vana was the son of Vikukshi and Vana's son was the mighty Anranya ; his son was Prithu and the son of Prithu was Trishanku ; the great Dhundhumara was the son of Trishanku and his son was the hero Yuvanashwa. The renowned Mandhata was born of Yuvanashwa and Mandhata's son was named Susandhi. Susandhi had two sons Dhruva-sandhi and Prasenajit. Bharata was the son of Dhruva-sandhi and the renowned Asit was the son of Bharata. The three sons of Asit were Hihaxas, Talajanghas and Shashavindus, great Kings, who, hostile to their sire, waged war against him and sent him into exile. Then King Asit, with his two consorts, going to the Himalayas, there laid down his life, leaving the queens pregnant, whereat one of them, to destroy the fruit of the other's womb, gave her poison.

"At that time, a sage of the family of Bhrigu dwelt on the heights of Himalaya, by name Chyavana practising penance there. Then the lotus-eyed Queen Kalindi, desirous of bearing an excellent son approached the sage who resembled a god and bowed before him. The brahmin addressed the queen saying : ' O Fortunate One, thou bearest in thy womb, a hero, soon to be born together with the poison ; have no anxiety.'

"The queen, faithful to her deceased lord, overcome with sorrow, fearing the death of her child, paid homage to the muni. Thereafter she bore a son, born with the poison administered by the other wife and he was named Sagara.

"The son of Sagara was Asumanjas, and his son was Anshuman. The son of Anshuman was Dilipa, and Dilipa's son was Bhagiratha. The son of Bhagiratha was Kakustha and his son was Raghu. The son of Raghu, Prabradha became a demon, and was subsequently called Kalamashapada and his son was Shangana. The son of Shangana was Sudarshana, and his son was Agni-varna. Shighraga was the son of Agni-varna and the son of Shighraga was Manu. Manu's son was Prashushruka and his son was Ambarisha. Ambarisha's son was named Nahusha and his son was Yayati. The son of Yayati was Nabhaga.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

“The son of Nabhaga was Aja, and the son of Aja was King Dasaratha; the two sons of King Dasaratha are Rama and Lakshmana.

“O King, I have recounted the genealogy of King Ikswaku to thee. All these kings were noble, virtuous and distinguished in their love of truth.

“King Dasaratha requests the hands of thy daughters in marriage for his two sons, who are in every way worthy to be thy kinsmen. O Chief of Men, bestow thy daughters on them.”

CHAPTER 71

King Janaka gives an account of the succession and his dynasty

KING JANAKA, paying homage to the Sage Vasishtha, said : “O Maharishi, be peace with thee, hear the account of the succession of our dynasty. At the time of bestowing a daughter in marriage, it is customary for the father to recite the pedigree of his race, be gracious enough to hear me, O Lord.

“In ancient times, renowned in the three worlds was the King Nimi, eminent in virtue, a lover of truth and foremost among kings of that era. Nimi begot Mithi whose son was the first Janaka and he begot Udavasu. His son was Nandivardhana and he begot Suketu. Suketu begot the righteous Devarata and the son of Devarata was the royal Sage Brihadratha. He begot the great hero Mahavirya whose son was Dhratiman and his son was the truthful Sudhriti. He begot Dhrishta-Ketu and his son was the royal Sage Haryashwa. Haryashwa begot Maru. Then followed Prasidhaka, Kirttiratha, Devamirha, Bibudha, Mahidhraka, Kirttivaja and Maharoma. Maharoma begot Swarnaroma and his son was Hraswaroma. Hraswaroma had two sons of whom I, myself, am the elder, and this is my younger brother Kushadwaja. My father, bequeathing the kingdom to me and charging me with the care of Kushadwaja, retired to the forest. My aged sire, having passed from this world, I began to rule according to dharma,

BALA KANDA

supporting my brother with the utmost affection. After some time, the King Sudhanwa besieged the capital of Mithila, thereafter he sent me offers of peace on condition I surrendered my daughter, Sita, and also the sacred bow of Shiva to him. O Brahmarishi, on rejecting his offer a battle ensued between us in which Sudhanwa was slain. O Great Sage, King Sudhanwa being dead, I gave the kingdom of Sankasya to my well-beloved brother Kushadwaja. This is my well-beloved brother. O Sages, we submit ourselves in love, to thee.

“O Raghava, to Shri Ramachandra I give my daughter Sita, and Prince Lakshmana will receive the Princess Urmila. Sita, resembling a daughter of the gods, I bestow on Rama; verily with my whole heart do I yield these two daughters of mine to thy sons. O King, now be pleased to inaugurate the traditional distribution of kine in charity. Perform the Nandi-Mukha¹ ceremony so that the nuptials may be celebrated.

“To-day the Magda star is in the ascendant and in three days the Uttara Phalguni will have risen; the marriage should take place in that conjunction.

“For the purpose of ensuring their felicity, let Rama and Lakshmana now distribute cows, land, sesamum seed and other requisite offerings.”

CHAPTER 72

The marriage of the four sons of King Dasaratha is arranged and preparations commence

KING JANAKA having uttered these words, Mahamuni Vishwamitra, as desired by Shri Vasishtha, said to him :—

“O King, wonderful indeed are the two Houses of Ikshwaku and Videha, their glory is limitless, verily they have no equal. Shri Rama and Sita are in perfect accord one with the other, as also Lakshmana and Urmila, each equals the other in grace and heritage. O Virtuous King, I have something further to

¹ Nandi-mukha ceremony—The distribution of cows in charity.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

say, hear me. Thy younger brother, King Kushadwaja, unexcelled in virtue, has two daughters of incomparable beauty, these two I request for the sagacious Bharata and the pious Shatrughna. The four sons of King Dasaratha are youthful, handsome, resembling the gods, equal to the (four) guardians of the world. O Great King, bestow these two damsels on the younger sons of King Dasaratha. Thou art unequalled in virtue and the House of Ikshwaku is without a peer."

Hearing the magnanimous words of Shri Vishwamitra echoed by Shri Vasishtha, King Janaka with joined palms humbly addressed the two august sages :—

"O Holy Ones, I am proud that you have approved the alliance of my House with the House of Ikshwaku. Your commands shall be accomplished. The daughters of King Kushadwaja shall be given to the Princes Bharata and Shatrughna in marriage. Let the four great sons of King Dasaratha be united with the four princesses on the same day. O Divine Sage, to-morrow the constellation Phalguni presided over by the deity Bhag¹ is in the ascendant. The wise consider this season as auspicious for the nuptials."

Shri Vasishtha answering "Be it so", King Janaka, in great humility, addressed the holy sages, saying : "O Spiritual Kings, it is by your favour that I am able to offer my daughters in marriage. Regard me as your servant. Ye are worthy of these seats prepared for you. Let my kingdom now belong to the King Dasaratha and my affections extend to the kingdom of Ayodhya. I have spoken truth. O Holy Ones, do what is considered necessary."

King Dasaratha hearing with attention the words uttered by King Janaka was pleased and replied, saying : "O Brothers, possessing innumerable excellent qualities, ye have honoured the holy rishis and kings with abundant hospitality. May you be blessed ! May happiness be yours ! With your leave I shall now withdraw to my own apartments to inaugurate the preliminary rites."

Having taken leave of the King of Mithila, Shri Dasaratha, preceded by the holy sage, went away.

¹ Bhag—one of the Adityas q.v., whose special season Uttara Phalguni is considered favourable for marriages or alliances.

BALA KANDA

The following day, having fulfilled the traditional rites, King Dasaratha gave away innumerable cows in charity. On behalf of each of his sons, he bestowed on the brahmins thousands of cows whose horns were covered with gold, yielding rich milk, together with their calves. With every cow the king gave away a metal milking vessel. On that day, four hundred thousand cows were given away by him. That mighty king holding his sons supremely dear, gave incalculable wealth in their name. King Dasaratha, performing these deeds of charity, surrounded by his sons, resembled Brahma attended by the Regents of the world.

CHAPTER 73

The marriage ceremonies are completed

ON the day on which King Dasaratha distributed the cows in charity, the great hero Yudhajit, the son of the King Kaikeya and the maternal uncle of Bharata, also came to Janaka's capital.

Seeing King Dasaratha, he made enquiries as to his welfare and said : " O King, the Lord of Kaikeya, through affection, sends tidings of his well-being to thee, and seeks to know if it be well with thy friends. O Great King, my father desired to see Prince Bharata, and for this purpose I went to Ayodhya. There, hearing that thou hadst gone to Mithila with thy sons, for their nuptials, I came hither in haste to see the son of my sister."¹

King Dasaratha thereupon duly honoured his kinsman who spent the night happily in company with the princes.

The following day, rising early, King Dasaratha performing his customary devotions, proceeded to the sacrificial pavilion, escorted by the sages.

At an auspicious hour in the presence of Shri Vasishtha and other sages, Shri Ramachandra and his brothers adorned with every ornament being present, the preliminary ceremonies were performed.

¹ = Bharata being the son of Queen Kaikeyi, daughter of the King of Kaikeyi.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Then Shri Vasishtha addressed King Janaka saying : “ O King, King Dasaratha has inaugurated the preliminary ceremonies, he now awaits thy pleasure. The sacred rite is completed when host and guests come together. Be pleased, therefore, to perform the principal nuptial rites.”

King Janaka listened to the words of the great-souled Vasishtha and answered : “ What guard detains King Dasaratha at the gate ? Whose sanction does his royal majesty seek ? Is not this his house ? Let the king enter ! O Chief of Sages, my daughters, in readiness, stand at the altar, bright as the clear flame. I, standing near, await you all. There is no need for delay. Let the king cause the ceremony to take place without further hindrance.”

Then King Dasaratha with his sons and the holy sages entered the marriage pavilion. Thereafter, King Janaka addressed Shri Vasishtha, saying : “ O Virtuous Sage, with the other sages perform the wedding ceremony.”

Then Shri Vasishtha ignited the sacrificial fire in the centre of the pavilion. Shri Vishwamitra and Shri Shatananda standing before him, sprinkled the altar with perfume, and decorated it with flowers. Then he set out the golden vessels and the sacred kusha grass, filling many pots with incense and arranging them in the form of a conchshell. Dishes filled with parched corn and rice were placed there, and durbha grass spread about, the sacred formulas being pronounced over them. The holy rishis now lit a fire pronouncing the Vedic mantrams and offered oblations into it.

Shri Sita, adorned with jewels, took her seat by the sacred fire opposite Shri Ramachandra. King Janaka, addressing the Son of Raghu, said : “ O Rama, from to-day my daughter Sita will be thy companion in virtue. Accept her, O Prince, and take her hand in thine. This fortunate princess, faithful and tender, will constantly attend thee, following thee like a shadow, in loving obedience. May you both be happy.”

Saying this, King Janaka sprinkled on them water purified by mantrams. Then all the gods cried, “ Jai ! Jai ! ”¹ and divine music sounded, while a shower of flowers fell from the skies.

Thus was Sita joined in marriage to Shri Ramachandra.

¹ Jai ! Jai !—literally Victory ! Victory !

BALA KANDA

Then King Janaka said to Shri Lakshmana : “ O Lakshmana, come hither, peace be with thee ! Take in thy hand the hand of my daughter Urmila, tarry not, O Prince.”

Having thus spoken, Janaka likewise addressed Prince Bharata, saying : “ O Son of Raghu, accept the hand of the Princess Mandavi ” and to Prince Shatrughna, he said : “ O Great Prince, accept the hand of Shruta-kirti. O Princes of the House of Raghu, be gentle and faithful to your wives as they will be to you, receive them now, let there be no delay.”

Thus instructed by King Janaka, the four princes, taking the hands of the four princesses as directed by the Sage Vasishta, circumambulated the fire, King Janaka and the sages performing the rites as ordained by the sacred ordinance.

As the nuptial ceremony of the four princes of the House of Raghu with the four princesses terminated, a rain of flowers fell on them from the sky. Divine music sounded, nymphs danced and the celestial singers broke into paeons of praise. All these marvellous events marked the wedding of the sons of King Dasaratha while the princes, circumambulating the fire, were united with their brides.

Thereafter with their wives, they returned to their apartments and King Janaka with his relatives and friends, with a joyful heart having taken part in the festivities, also withdrew.

CHAPTER 74

Parasurama appears amidst inauspicious signs

THE night being past, the great Sage Vishwamitra took leave of King Dasaratha and King Janaka and, blessing the princes and their sire, departed for the Himalayas to meditate there. The holy rishi being gone, King Dasaratha begged the permission of the Lord of Mithila to return to his capital. Bidding farewell to the pious king, Janaka escorted him for some distance on his way.

To the King of Ayodhya, on behalf of his daughter, King

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Janaka gave a hundred thousand cows, woollen cloths, countless silken robes and richly decorated elephants, horses and chariots. He also bestowed on him male and female attendants, numberless golden coins with quantities of pearls and coral. All these and many other gifts King Janaka gave with a joyful mind, and having taken leave of King Dasaratha, returned to Mithila, whereupon King Dasaratha with his illustrious sons, preceded by the sages, started on the homeward journey, accompanied by his army.

As the sages, with Shri Ramachandra, advanced in company with the king, the screeching of strange and terrible birds was heard, while frightened deer fled across their path.

Perceiving these inauspicious signs, the king addressed Shri Vasishtha, saying : " O Holy Guru, why do the birds cry thus ominously, and the deer traverse our path ? What do these omens portend ? My mind is filled with anxiety, O Divine Lord."

The Maharishi Vasishtha, in gentle tones, replied : " O King, the fearful crying of the birds betokens some great danger, but the crossing of the deer from left to right indicates a speedy end to thy fears."

While they were yet speaking, the earth began to quake and and giant trees fell down, darkness covered the earth and clouds of dust veiled the sun, nor could the cardinal points be discerned. In the great dust storm that followed, the army was overwhelmed with terror and all became paralysed, save Shri Vasishtha, King Dasaratha and the princes alone.

When the dust was allayed and the army somewhat recovered, Shri Vasishtha beheld the son of Yamadagni of dreadful aspect. With matted hair, Parasurama, the humbler of the pride of kings and emperors, drew near.

The appearance of the muni resembling the splendour of Mount Kailasha or the fires of dissolution at the end of the world-period was hardly to be borne by human eyes. With his battle axe on his shoulder, bearing a mighty bow, brilliant as lightning, he appeared like Shiva about to strike down Tripura.¹

Beholding Parasurama resembling a blazing fire, the sages reflected among themselves and said : " His father being slain,

¹ Tripura—the name of a demon slain by Shiva.

BALA KANDA

has Parasurama come again to destroy the warrior caste ? ” Was not his anger appeased when he formerly destroyed the whole warrior caste ? Has he come again to take his revenge on us ? ”

Reflecting thus, they approached Parasurama with traditional offerings, saying : “ O Rama, accept this arghya.”

Shri Parasurama accepting the offering, then addressed Shri Rama.

CHAPTER 75

He challenges Rama to combat

“ O RAMA, O Illustrious Hero, I have heard of thy great prowess. I have also been acquainted with thy heroic deed, the breaking of the bow at Janakapura, verily a feat exciting wonder and surpassing imagination. Having heard of thine achievement, I, taking this other bow, have come hither. With this terrible bow named Yamadagni, show thy strength, O Rama, and placing an arrow in it, discharge it. Should'st thou be able to accomplish this, I will engage in honourable combat with thee.”

Hearing these words, King Dasaratha, became dejected and humbly addressed the rishi, saying : “ O Holy Parasurama, thou art a great brahmin sage, it becomes thee not to show anger to warriors ; be gracious unto my son, who is still a child. Thou art born in the family of Bhrigu and hast pledged thyself to Indra to bear arms no more. Having given the dominion of the world to Kashyapa and retired to the Mahendra mountain to practise asceticism, why hast thou now come hither to destroy us ? O Sage, if Rama is slain, none of us will survive.”

The great son of Jamadagni, disregarding the entreaty of King Dasaratha, again addressed Rama, saying : “ O Rama, these two bows of exquisite design, famed throughout the world, exceedingly powerful, were forged by Vishwakarma.¹ One of them, wielded by Shri Shiva in combat with Tripura, was broken by thee. The other, held by me, of inexpressible power, was

¹ Vishwakarma—the architect of the gods.

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

given to Vishnu by the gods and is known to give victory over the foe ; it is equal in moment to that which thou hast broken.

“ Formerly the gods asked Brahma which of the two excelled the other and Shri Brahma, acquainted with their intention, invoked a quarrel between Vishnu and Mahadeva. They entered into combat one with the other. By the shout raised by Shri Vishnu, Shri Mahadeva was struck motionless and his bow unstrung. Then the gods and rishis came to that place and caused the two gods to be reconciled. Thereafter the gods esteemed the bow of Vishnu to be the more powerful and Shri Shiva surrendered his bow to the King of Mithila, together with all its arrows.

“ This bow, belonging to Vishnu, was given in ancient times by that god to Richika and he gave it to his son Jamadagni, my father. He having renounced the bearing of weapons, retired to practise austerity, when the rash and foolish monarch Sahasravaku slew him. Hearing of the cruel death of my sire, I successively destroyed the warrior caste, from generation to generation, thus acquiring dominion over the earth. I conferred this great dominion as a gift on the Sage Kashyapa at the completion of a sacrifice, and retired to the Mahendra mountain, cheerfully observing the practice of Yoga. To-day, O Valiant Prince, acquainted with thy great achievement, I have come hither to behold thee. Receive this bow, bestowed on my ancestors by Shri Vishnu and in the spirit of a warrior, place an arrow on it. If thou succeed in drawing the bow, I will challenge thee to fight.”

CHAPTER 76

Parasurama is vanquished and deprived of his glory and power

HEARING these words, Shri Rama having regard for the presence of his sire, answered with restraint, saying : “ O Parasurama, thy deeds are known to me, as also the avenging of thy fathers’ murderers. Methinks thou dost deem me lacking in valour,

BALA KANDA

I, a kshatriya, and a descendant of the Solar race. O Rishi, witness my prowess."

Having spoken thus, Shri Ramachandra, incensed, seized the bow and arrows from the rishi's hands and stringing it, placed an arrow on it. While drawing the mighty bow, the son of Dasaratha addressed the rishi with defiance, saying : " O Sage, thou art a brahmin and as such do I honour thee ; thou art further a kinsman of Shri Vishwamitra, therefore I shall not slay thee with this arrow, but by this shaft I will rob thee of the power of motion so that thou shalt no longer be able to travel through space, or I will banish thee from those high regions to which thou hast attained by the practice of penance. Say, what is thy desire ? This divine arrow of Vishnu, possessing the power of vanquishing the strength and pride of the foe, may not be restored by me to the quiver, till it has accomplished its great purpose."

When Rama placed the arrow in the sacred bow, Brahma, with the gods, assembled to behold that glorious deed, followed by the gandharvas, apsaras, yakshas and other beings. Shri Ramachandra, having taken up the mighty bow, the three worlds began to tremble and Parasurama, bereft of his divine power, stood aghast. Deprived of his glory and powerless, Shri Parasurama with humble entreaty, addressed the lotus-eyed Rama :—

" When the dominion of the earth was given by me to the sage Kashyapa, he said ' Thou must not inhabit this kingdom '. Therefore, O Rama, in obedience to the sage, I do not stay on the earth by night. This world is no longer mine, but belongs to Kashyapa. O Rama, do not deprive me of the power of movement, but allow me speedily to return to the beautiful Mahendra mountain. Thou can'st deprive me of the merits earned by the practice of Yoga. I know Thee to be the Imperishable, Thou art verily Vishnu Himself, none but Thou could'st wield this bow. O Son of Raghu, the gods have assembled to behold Thee ; Thou art pre-eminent in combat, and the conqueror of Thine enemies. O Virtuous Prince, to be defeated by Thee is no ignominy ; discharge Thy matchless arrow and I will return to the Mahendra mountain."

THE RAMAYANA OF VALMIKI

Thereupon Shri Ramachandra discharged the arrow and the merit of Parasurama was rendered void, whereupon he speedily departed to the Mahendra mountain.

The darkness being dispelled and the whole world once more filled with light, Rama was worshipped by the gods and rishis, and Shri Parasurama having circumambulated the son of Dasaratha, returned to his own hermitage.

CHAPTER 77

*King Dasaratha with his army, the princes and their brides,
return to Ayodhya*

SHRI PARASURAMA having departed, Shri Rama delivered the bow and arrows as a trust to the god Varuna. Having offered salutations to Shri Vasishtha and the other sages he, seeing his father filled with apprehension, addressed him, saying : " Sire, Shri Parasurama has now gone, do thou command thine army to proceed towards Ayodhya."

King Dasaratha, hearing Rama's words, embraced him and reflected that his son was born to him a second time. Then summoning his army to advance, he in a chariot, adorned with banners, to the fanfare of trumpets proclaiming victory, entered Ayodhya.

The streets of the city sprinkled with water and flowers, appeared beautiful, and the citizens rejoicing at the return of their sovereign, greeted him with shouts of welcome.

Met by the brahmins inhabiting the city, the king with his friends and relatives, followed by the princes and their brides, entered the royal palace which was white as snow.

There, the kindred of the king welcomed him with garlands and sandalwood. The Queens Kaushalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi received the brides and conducted the fortunate Sita, the illustrious Urmila, and the two daughters of Kushadwaj to their palace, with auspicious rites. Arrayed in sumptuous silken robes, and borne to the temple to worship the holy images, the

BALA KANDA

brides then offered respectful salutations to their mother-in-laws, and others worthy of honour. Thereafter, each began to live with her lord in her own palace.

Shri Ramachandra with the other princes, possessing the knowledge of the use of weapons and the science of defence, passed the time with their friends in attendance on their aged sire.

After some time, King Dasaratha said to his son Bharata :
“ O my Son, thy maternal uncle, who came for the purpose of taking thee to his home, still tarries in the capital, therefore, go with him to see thy grandfather.”

Prince Bharata and Prince Shatrughna prepared to start on their journey and took leave of their father and their highly compassionate brother Rama.

Bharata being gone, Shri Rama and Lakshmana ministered to the aged king as if he were a god and in his name performed charitable deeds among the people of the city.

Rama also ministered to his mother with deep affection, and served his Guru with single-minded devotion. His noble behaviour gratified the king, the brahmins, merchants and other castes ; his sweet disposition and pious conduct charmed the people of the capital. Rama, wholly devoted to truth was renowned for his virtue, and endowed with every excellent quality like Swayambhu¹-Brahma himself.

For a long time did Shri Rama enjoy a life of content with Sita. To him, she was dear beyond all things and he surrendered his whole heart to her. Love is enhanced by beauty, virtue and gentleness, and Sita possessed all these in an equal degree with Rama. Lovely as a goddess, Shri Sita was able to discern the thoughts of her lord before he expressed them. The beautiful Sita with Shri Ramachandra wholly satisfied, resembled Lakshmi, the consort of the incomparable Vishnu.

¹ Swayambhu—the Imperishable or Self-existent, a name of Brahma, the creator.

END OF BALA KANDA

